

マージナル・オペレーション

☆ 星海社FICTIONS
MARGINAL
OPERATION

02

ARATA THE MEET OF 30 YEARS
THE NEW JOB WHICH
HE CHOSE TO WORK
A PRIVATE MILITARY
SECURITY COMPANY
THAT IS, IT WAS



芝村裕吏

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ILLUSTRATION

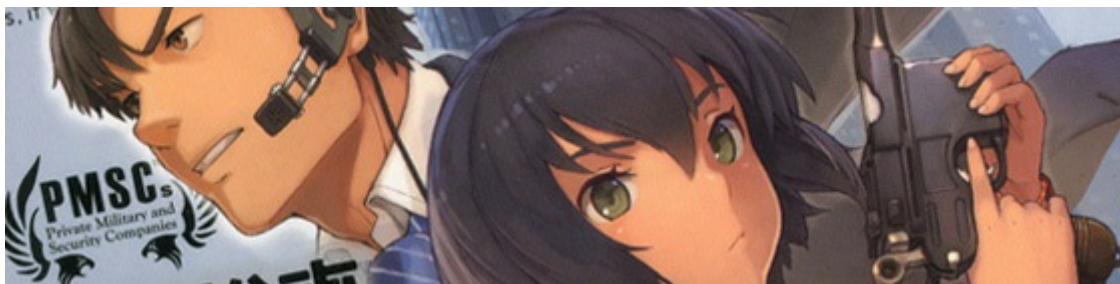
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Marginal Operation

02

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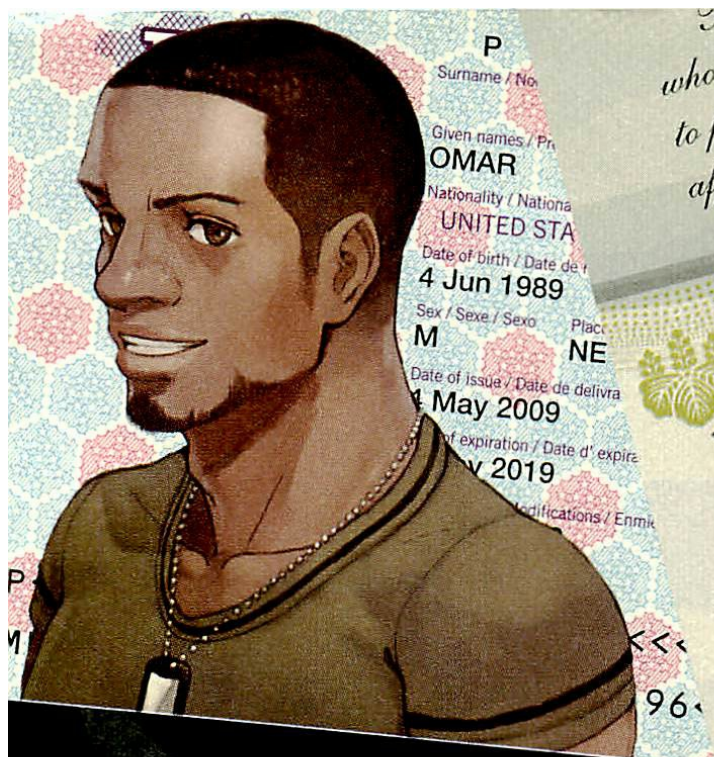


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OMAR

American of an African descent.
Arata's ex associate, they work together since they were prisoners.
Capable soldier and a friend who can be trusted.



ARATA

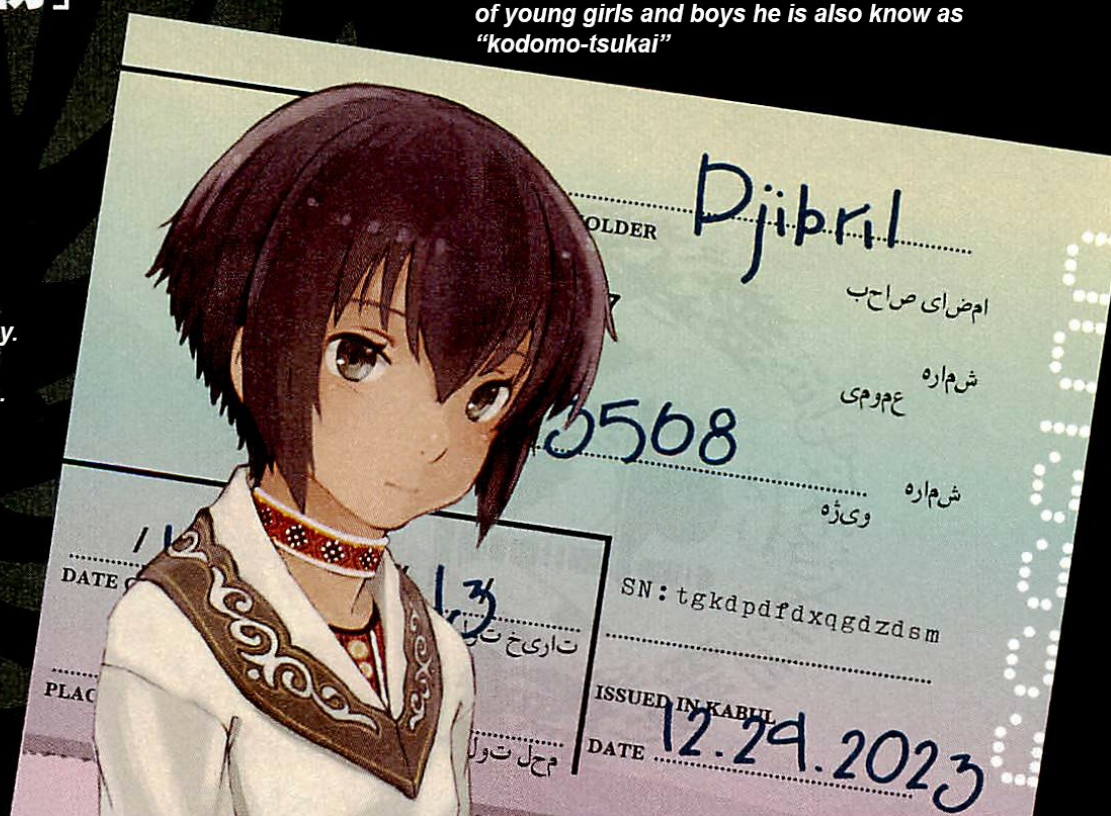
Japanese. Protagonist of this story.
From a NEET he became an operator of a private military company. He uses his above average memory and military talent.
In the world of mercenaries as a genius commander of young girls and boys he is also known as "kodomo-tsukai"

CTERS

[登場人物]

DJIBRIL

Tajikistani. Girl with the name of an angel.
Given as a soldier to a private security company. She admires Arata and works together with him. She doesn't like Sophie





SOPHIA

American. Fascinated by elves she performs a plastic surgery of her ears and being unable to pay her debts during recession she joins a private military company. In addition to criticising machismo in the company and being one-sidedly infatuated with Arata, her thoughts and actions are impossible to predict.



LANSON

American. Ex Green Beret. Arata's superior in the private military company. According to Sophia a macho. As the first one he noticed Arata's military talent.

MARGINAL 02 CHARA



IBN

Tajikistani. One of the child soldiers. He fulfills the role of a team leader.



HAKIM

Iranian. One of the child soldiers. Younger than the others. A born poet.



GINI

Tajikistani. One of the child soldiers. She fulfills the role of a team leader. A cheerful and energetic girl.

Chapter 1

Back in Japan

Returning to Japan

Appearance of Japan from the plane was the same as usual, which seemed strange to me.

No, it's wrong to think that because I'm different now, the country also has changed. I understand that much myself.

After 1 year, at least seen from the sky, it seemed that there wasn't any change in Japan. I recall my room, where I lived back then. Room full of figurines, manga and LN's.

I smiled bitterly, when I recalled about my otaku days. Now those are only memories I barely remember. I've done too much evil for money, to fully enjoy them. You're disgusting – I think to myself. Originally I found that new job for my modest hobby of manga and figurines.

I've changed. From NEET, through getting a job and becoming unemployed, having problems with buying food, to finding work at a foreign private military company. I became a mercenary without a weapon, but I left that too. And now I'm jobless again. Furthermore – adding to this 20 kids. Child soldiers, my former subordinates.

What a great success – I thought. Or great fall.

I was thinking of how to judge it, that in addition to being jobless, I'm unmarried and have two dozen kids, but I smiled and accepted that fact. I think that man fails trying. I'll enjoy the situation for now.

I look at the back seats. Everything is in order. There are 24 kids. Now they're going to enter the country with a tourist visa.

Some of them are nervous, some can't calm down if they don't hold a weapon. Some sleep like a log, some look at me. One who looks at me is a girl with an angel's name – Djibril. Soon – I only moved my lips. Djibril kept nodding.

Well, I guess everyone is anxious – I thought. Even sleeping kids were pale before getting on, so the fact that they're sleeping now is probably their reaction to this. They have no experience flying an airplane. Not many of them even knew where Japan is. They just knew Japan as a land of anime. I think that a while back it was a land of electronics, though. So Japan has probably changed as well.

We're landing very soon. I looked at the kids again and turned my head forward. Why is my heart pounding? Because I'm back? I have a feeling that's not the case. Isn't it because I'm with kids? No, that's not it too. I smiled. I'm enjoying my fall after all. It's fun to fall with a bang.

Someone would say I went mad, but then I would always answer that I do what I like so leave me alone.

For the time being I wondered if I'm going to be arrested. No, I guess you don't get arrested just like that. I think there's questioning. I believe that bringing at once 24 kids to the country, trouble will occur. In Afghanistan I bought them passports and nationality for convenience, but considering their value I doubted their reliability.

Well, even if I get arrested it's my win anyway. – I thought. If they discover false passports they will find out that it can't be said from which country those kids are, which will probably make quite an uproar. My win is undeniable. Just entering Japan is a victory. No matter what, kids won't run around with weapons on a battlefield.

We're landing. It says "Welcome to Japan". With a smile on my face we went down to the airport. Mixing with the crowd

we climbed the escalator and went to the immigration gate. There we go, now it will happen.

...Nothing was wrong.

We easily entered the country. Unexpectedly I was disappointed. What a pity. And here I thought I will be able to relax.

Kids are waiting for me. I changed the operation plan in my mind. But hey, I have many of them in my pocket.

For Japan's entryway Narita Airport is more shabby than Haneda. I'm thinking about absurd things like that I wanted to show kids the Haneda Airport especially.

"I guess it's quieter than I thought." – I said, while pulling up a suitcase.

Leader of the 24 kids, a girl with a headgear – Djibril, seemed disoriented and said:

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

I smile. Well, wanting to show them an imposing airport seem childish. I have to be more like an adult.

If I won't Djibril or someone else will have to quickly become one.

I know that I'm already 31. Seats for kids are limited, so if someone won't grow up, the new kids won't be able to sit on that seats.

To make children sit on children seats I have to move forward.

I just noticed that recently I keep becoming aware of things. While I'm enjoying an adult's reflection I decided to take responsibility for other adults and bear that unbearable weight. Specifically saying I decided that beside me I'll tell those

complaints to my only friend, honest and sober, my business partner friend, Omar.

“Omar went ahead, what about him?”

“I’ve heard he’s eating tempura.”

“I see. Shall we also eat?”

Djibril agreed and went with me.

I see a woman in a suit, who stately walks across the airport. Maybe because I became used to seeing sharply chiseled faces, the moderate one feels like something new. Long black hair are beautiful. I saw that Djibril looks at the same person. No, she undoubtedly perceive in a broader extent, clearly deciding if it’s a danger or not. She put on her headgear even deeper, rushed over to me with a trot and asked:

“Don’t you feel ashamed?”

I think for a while and smile bitterly.

“You mean that woman? Yeah. To tell you the truth I’m a bit ashamed. I was away from Japan for too long, you see.”

Djibril’s eyes sparkled from inside of her headgear with satisfaction.

“Then it’s fine.”

I didn’t know what’s fine, but I gathered the kids and we started marching. I wonder if 25 people will be able to seat in a tempura store – I thought.

I examine the map on an information board and look for a tempura store. So it’s on the 4th floor^[1]. Lack of scale on it annoys me, but it’s due to the nature of my former job. I looked toward nearby telephone box and based on a distance measured by eye I calculated the scale of the information board.

I turned to the same direction as the person with black hair a

moment ago. We took the escalator.

“What... are we going to eat!?” – said with embarrassment one of the former soldier boys in English. He hides behind Djibril.

You may say that he has a small frame, even smaller than Djibril. Which isn't surprising for a 10-year-old. Voice, which asked what are we going to eat was high. If I was in my 20's I would probably say it was noisy. As a 31-year-old I don't have a problem with it.

“Fried Japanese food. Fish and prawns with sesame oil, and deep-fried vegetables.”

Faces of the former boy soldiers showed disgust. Maybe it's because of differences in their cuisine, in which deep-fried food isn't very popular. Although that would-be fried food, which we were eating at the camp was something even I would want to avoid. I don't know what technique they were using, but the fact it doesn't cause heartburn is it's only credit.

“Many people say that since it's a high-class food it's tasty.” – I added and then the eyes of the former boy soldiers sparkled.

Shine in their eyes express surprise. Former girl soldiers are wearing headgears, so I don't know about them.

“But that prawn animals are spiders.” – Says a 10-year-old boy. Even for his broken language that was too abridged.

I think that those former soldier boys birthplace isn't far from Aral sea, but food from it probably isn't used. I wonder why. Maybe because it's expensive.

“It's a completely different kind. Appearance too.” – I said and laughed. The 10-year-old boy was overwhelmed.

Exercise before a meal

I've reached the restaurant on the 4th floor laughing. This

floor was an observation deck with a big window. Immediately after, I've heard a short scream. I saw that former boy and girl soldiers are all acting the same. I taught them spreading out and prostrating. This is what I expect from them, but for Japanese people, who don't have a sense of danger it was perceived as something strange.

I strained my ears, wondering what's happened. There's no gunshots. The scream continues. I guessed that somebody had an edged tool. I suspect a random slasher. This time when I saw Japanese who were starting to make an uproar I thought it's stupid and wanted to laugh at them, but actually I didn't say anything, because Djibril and the rest organized 4 separate tactical S units and entrusted command of the single reinforced unit P to me.

"Arata, your commands." – said Djibril, with a face literally as if she has been entrusting her fate to me.

However it wasn't entrusting made in desperation. Neither in resignation or acceptance. She had a face, which was just automatically awaiting orders.

I smiled. Well, shall we do a little exercise before a meal – I think.

"We still don't have a radio or cellphones. We're going to cooperate with eyesight. From now on I attach to each tactical S unit letters A C D E. SD, SE. Aim for a near trash can. Check if there are any explosive materials. If not, collect cans to throw. Let one person from 2 units, who doesn't have any special instructions and is good with grenades link together and start throwing them. Hurry up."

I stopped thinking about turning around and running, because if I were the enemy I would first gain control of the entrance. I still don't know the adversary that much to expect stupidity from him. I don't know if there's any enemy in the

first place.

“SC commander Djibril on the spot. Waiting for orders. SD, SE are back so give me directions. I request for SA assistance. I think for myself. It’s good, right?”

“Yes.”

Djibril softly nodded. She’s somehow proudly looking at me. I ignored it. She sometimes overestimates me.

“Ok, SA and I will have a picnic. Let’s go. We’re going to provisionally call the enemy B1.”

I moved out, proceeding close to the wall. For some reason there’s not much people who stick to the wall in this emergency. I used that fact.

Many people are running away. There are screams. People fall down one after another. A person holding a knife with a blade about 40cm long is running. It seems that people who failed to escape are being stabbed from the back.

“Looks like an amateur.” – I said to a boy from SA.

He closes one eye and is watching the person with a knife.

“Yeah amateur. Without even a backup.”

I wanted to return already. I can’t say the threat is very high.

You’re not going to help? – I felt like I heard Djibril’s voice. I make a frown. She’s really an angel – I thought. Recently even if she’s not near, sometimes her remarks reach to me.

I think for a second. Well, for educational purposes it’s not good to let someone die without helping – I thought. I remember that it’s not what was taught at the mercenary job, but I want those kids to grow into better adults.

“Before first corner to the right there are signboards of the Ramen and Italian restaurants. Bring them here, we’re going to use them as a weapon. Quickly.”

Two boys had run off.

I knocked the wall seeing that in a military sense it was an amateur criminal. My hand hurts. I think I've been knocking too vigorously. I wave my hand to the enemy. B1, holding a knife approached me. Skinhead, late 20s or early 30s. In other word, about similar age as me. I'm sorry for my prejudice, but I thought he is an unemployed or a NEET. I thought that I saw somewhere a similar mass indiscriminate killing, I probably remember it because the summer was hot or something, though it's May now. I don't know if being a mercenary wasn't a worse thing. I dropped the smile. Boys did the same. And then we're standing face to face with him like that.

He probably didn't like it or something and he started running at us.

Oh dear. We're unarmed but even without me there are 4 of us. Former boy soldiers are dispersing and flanking him. He probably realized he went forward too far and constantly watching his back, brandished the knife. It seems that it was his tactic to not let anybody draw near him. It can only be described as clumsy. I can't stand that he injured someone like that. – I thought.

“I apologize for the delay. We're coming for backup.” – The voice from behind hasn't finished talking, while can throwing has begun. It was simultaneous.

He doesn't like that former boy soldiers are surrounding him and distanced himself. Djibril stood at the front to protect me. B1 shouts something and while trying to thrust at me, he fell over. He trampled down on the can. That's what happens if you don't watch your steps. Former soldier boys came right away with a standing signboards and pinned down his right hand and head. One from squad A trampled down vigorously on his knee and broke his leg.

If we break his legs that would be a full course torture, but I stopped it. Not because of compassion towards the criminal but from an educational point of view.

“Confiscate the weapon and wait for policemen.”

Airport staff and policemen come together. I think it will be hard to escape in this situation. Morality of the children will be probably Investigated.

I thought something is odd because running onlookers were taking out their cellphones and started recording. Now I'm scared. I said to Djibril to start aiding the wounded people.

Boys, girls and tempura

Our schedule went out of order. Even contacting the hotel has been delayed.

Today we're gonna stay at a cheap ryokan^[2] in Asakusabashi, although we're not even there yet. It's probably around 3 pm now.

Currently we're at the Chiba police station. Incident was probably big considering investigation at the airport. It was not far away, but we traveled here by a minibus. At least it looks like it's close from here to the station.

That was my first time in the interrogation room. It was dreary, but had calm colors and was much more modern than in television.

I've been questioned in detail by a polite policeman with uniform under the presence of an interpreter about things like current stay contact address. I don't really know why there's an interpreter, although I understand that for the boys and girls it's necessary. I thought that I will be questioned by a detective with a suit, but it was different than I've been expecting. Everything is an experience.

Because of that performance of people, who were recording wounded people, I felt like I already tasted enough of Japan. I wasn't expecting any words of appreciation and I didn't get them anyway.

When I was living in Japan I wasn't aware of it, but now I know what kind of country Japan is. As a plan B, besides being arrested, I thought about founding a security company, but I felt that intention suddenly faded away. This country is bad for the children's education.

Asked about the schedule from now on, I told about sightseeing plans. In fact I planned to do it for a while and I had current reservations in hotels at several places, so in that area questioning wasn't strict. However, as always – bureaucratic bungling took a sick amount of time.

When they thanked for our effort and released us it was already past 5 pm. When I thought that those thanks was said like to a subordinate I felt subtly angry. Although I knew that will happen, it stirred me from educational perspective. Humans are selfish.

Kids, who were released before me were sleeping at the same police station hall, on the bench placed along the wall. Sun was shining from the west, but wasn't setting yet. I thought that for a human it's a delicate, lulling light. In Central Asia because of dry air, the setting sun was terribly strong, bright and it ended in an instant. There's no such thing in Japan. For better or worse Japan is a mild country. It can be probably said that the nature is kind.

Djibril is sleeping at the very edge with a tilted head leaning on 3 boys. I was satisfied with myself that there's no assault rifle in those hands. I must praise them somehow – I thought. If we're going to eat tempura I'll have to add them one prawn.

When I smiled, a person who was leaning their back on the

wall, moved and approached me.

“Errr...”

When I took my eyes off the children, someone called me and I saw a standing figure. I remember that bundled pretty black hair. It was the woman in a plain suit, who passed us before on the airport.

She probably walks a lot, that’s probably why she doesn’t wear high heels, but because of it she looks short. But still... higher than Djibril. Lately I somehow can’t get rid of referring to Djibril in every comparison, I wonder myself why.

“Thank you.”

When she bowed her head vigorously, I was surprised. It was in Japan, where I first got a proper battlefield etiquette. She thanks me for the rescue. Despite what everyone thinks, there isn’t anything more after that in Japan^[3].

“No, I’m glad you’re alive. You were just heading in the same direction.” – When I replied, she looked at me with surprise.

“We passed each other.” – She was passing strictly before me, but explaining that would be bothersome so I just answered like that.

“Oh really? Well... you’ve got great memory.” – she said, getting a little red on her face, though mainly the tips of her ears were getting red.

“No, I just happened to remember that pretty black hair.” – when I frankly said it, she concealed her ears.

“What is it?” – I asked.

“No, it’s nothing.” – she said, still concealing her ears.

“I see.” – Not knowing what it’s about I pretended that I understand. I think about changing the subject. Me and ears don’t get along well. That’s why even if they’re becoming a

subject, I try to not get too near them.

I observe her. She waits for me to say something. I wondered how old she could be. By looking at her I guessed she's probably a bit younger than me.

"Did you happen to wait for me the whole time?"

"Ah, yes."

To thank? – I was about to say, but I kept silent. She probably looked after the children as well.

So there are still decent fellows in Japan – I thought. No, there probably were decent people when I was living in Japan too. I just couldn't see them.

"Thank you." – I said. I felt somehow embarrassed, using Japanese after so much time.

"No, I'm the one who should say thanks. You saved me." – She bows her head again. I have a feeling that there's a sense of closeness in this. Different than common behavior of Japanese people or in business I belong to. I concluded that she's one of those people that have a hard time making a living.

I'm not that close with anyone except Djibril, kids and Omar.

Before I knew it I saw that she was looking directly at me.

"Can I ask your name?" – she said, concealing her ears.

"Arata, you write it as 新田. Arata, Ryota."

"Mr. Arata."

"Yes."

After she stretched her back and slowly separated her hands from her ears, she took out a business card from the hanging shoulder bag on her arms.

"That's me."

It was a simple business card with just a personal name. Stiff

paper, which makes a pleasant sound when flipped. I know it from that dirty small design company, those were empty business cards^[4].

I tried to remember what kind of customers were using them.
She's looking at me.

"What is it?"

"Ms. Yukie Ito?"

"Yes, correct." – she said with shyness.

Ms. Ito hesitates with her words at strange points.

Besides the very good quality of the paper, the font is also very refined. I think about it. Such things are expensive. Customers, which are using empty business cards are from night business^[5] or politicians. The latter one, considering the cost of it. I looked again at Ms. Ito. I can't imagine she's from the night business, but she also doesn't look like a politician.

"Excuse me, is something wrong after all?"

"Ah, forgive me. It's a business card with just a name, so..." – I said frankly.

"That's true. I'm sorry. That's because of the nature of my work."

"I see. Work?"

"Yes. Erm, are you from an NGO?"

"Yes, how do you...?"

"I heard from those kids...."

Ms Ito looked at the row of deeply sleeping kids on the bench. They are like angels, sleeping. In fact there is one, with an angel's name. I smiled, but I didn't have the intention to do it.

"Oh, you took care of them. Thank you."

“A school trip, isn’t it?”

She said concealing her ears in panic, with an expression as if she didn’t know if such way of talking is appropriate.

I knew what she wanted to say, so I nodded.

“I wanted to show them Japan. I thought that eventually by the time when this kids grow up and they build a country, village or make their own kids, what they saw here will do them good.”

“I see... I’m sorry. Make use of your valuable first day then.”

Ms. Ito bowed her head. While concealing her ears. And red face.

“It’s alright.”

“They moved with great unity. It will probably make a good lesson for Japan kids too.”

I considered a bitter smile, but couldn’t make myself to do it.

“I don’t know.” – I said.

“What?”

“They move like that, because they were at war.”

“Ah...”

She put a hand on her mouth and kept silent. She looked ashamed.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Well then, we have to head to the hotel.”

“Er, Mr. Arata.”

“What is it?”

“Don’t you have a cellphone or something?”

“Yeah, I want one, but still haven’t signed a contract. It will be nice to have one at least for a short time.”

“Oh, is that so? I see. Excuse me, erm...” – after hesitation she looked at me.

“Maybe we’ll meet again someday.”

“Yes”

I wore a smile and bid farewell to her.

I think about how I will wake up the children. Shall I shake their shoulders or poke their cheeks.

I couldn’t help myself and I woke them by poking their cheeks. I saw Djibril’s twinkling pupils from the inside of the headgear. She wakes up, confused.

“So that’s how it is?”

So that’s how it is, what? I woke up everyone, thinking about it.

Unfortunately the kids are waking up other kids, so I couldn’t poke their cheeks more than half a minute. What a shame. There won’t be another chance.

“You have to be hungry. This time for sure we are going to eat tempura.” – I said. In the meantime I have to look for Omar. Where could he be?

Without looking for Omar

Leaving the police station I wondered how I’m going to find him. He’s a big black man, besides also an adult, so I’m not worrying. But I also feel uncomfortable that he’s not with us.

I should have rented a cell phone on the airport. No, without knowing his number it doesn’t matter.

I concluded that Omar will eventually join us at the hotel. In that case, he will forgive me that I didn’t look for him. I turned around and apologized to kids, who weren’t hiding their

boredom, and said that we're going to the hotel.

Everyone nods. Except one. That was Djibril. I look forward feeling bad about it, but I can't walk looking at Djibril behind my back all the time.

She behaves grumpy.

A meal is important – I said to her in my mind and smiled. No matter how powerful a force is, without food it will break in 3 days.

We're going toward the nearest station from the police. I had a hard time here, but I missed Japan's soil, so I cherished those few hundred meters of walking. It's May. Shortly after the Golden Week.

Now when I think about it, Japan had a lot of holidays. When the kids and Omar will hear that in every month there are national holidays they'll probably make a strange face. That is a bit peculiar thing about Japan.

"There are a lot of metal boxes." – said Hakim, one of the former boy soldiers.

After I nodded with a grave expression I said that those are vending machines. Hakim looks like he doesn't understand.

"Vending machines are in Japan for a long time. They are stores, which are selling drinks."

"Where are the people?"

"They're machines."

"Don't they break or make mistakes?"

In the same moment Hakim said it, kids assembled and started to ask a lot of questions. It seems like the conversation between me and Hakim wasn't interesting enough for them. There weren't any vending machines in the camp after all – I thought.

“How does it make drinks?”

“How thieves deal with it?”

“What happens during the holidays?”

For them holidays were sacred. They even feel like it's forbidden to work during that time.

I struggled with explanations. It seems like Japan is a stranger land than you can imagine. I bought a single can of orange juice and passed it to Hakim. He dropped the can, probably because of the shock from the cold temperature.

“It's cold!”

On those words the kids made an uproar. In my case, as for a common Japanese I think that drinks are good when they're cold, but for them it apparently appeared odd. It's on the same level as when you see ice floating in the alcohol for the first time.

“There are warm drinks and there are cold drinks.”

“It cools down the body.” – said annoyed Djibril and picked up the juice. Despite that they're from central Asia, where the sunlight is stronger and it's hotter than in Japan, in the countryside they believe with confidence that it's bad for health to cool down the body. To the extent that they were especially drawing lukewarm water.

If you want to drink cold water you must go further west from central Asia, to Iran or Iraq.

There's a lot to explain – I thought, while we were walking. Few steps further I found Omar at the ticket gate.

Thankfully the big, black man stands out. You can count on that. I smiled and lined up with Omar. Tired of waiting Omar also finally smiled. It was one of the precious things I gained outside of Japan.

“Was tempura good?”

“It was the best. I knew that there was some uproar, but it was so good I couldn’t leave my seat. It was that good.”

“So you can eat one more, right?” – I said.

Omar removed his sunglasses and looked at me again. I laughed.

Tempura Takenawa

Not far from the Kaminarimon in Asakusa, there is a restaurant called Takenawa. Maybe it’s an old restaurant, but they serve quite good tempura. Near the same period as I was working in the small design company I liked to eat there. Although that company is bankrupt now.

Thankfully I made a telephone reservation. There were a lot of people.

We sit in the tatami room without partitions and private rooms. Former boy and girl soldiers are taking their places without any troubles. They formerly led a life on the floor, where there were spread carpets, so they didn’t feel especially uncomfortable now.

It seemed like only Omar didn’t get used to that. Incidentally, he’s big, so he looked cramped.

Tempura comes one after another. Both boy and girls are not familiar with chopsticks. I stare in wonder at how they’re trying to use them. There is already one kid, who looks like he’s going to cry. Omar smiled, took and ate a shiitake from the tempura with bare hands. Everyone emulated him and did the same thing. I smiled grimly a little and sent an apologetic look to the store employee.

Tempura was very popular. A Large plate has been emptied

in a moment. A second helping comes. And it disappears too.

I smiled.

Rice wasn't very popular, but I think it was good. Boys from unit SA are telling Omar about the incident. It seems like they're speaking about me, but I intentionally failed to hear it. They mostly overvalue me.

"As usual, you can handle a situation in a place you've never even been before." – said Omar quietly and earnestly.

Apparently he was talking about the signboards. I answered that they are usually in Japan at storefronts. I look at Djibril. She pulls on her headgear deeper and looks down.

"You didn't like tempura?"

When I said that, she looked at me with upturned eyes. They were half-closed.

"Sorry. I should have listened to you before."

When I said that, Djibril pointed in the unexpected direction. I look there. There's a smiling actress, wearing western clothes on the Asahi Beer calendar. I turn my eyes back.

There is less food on the plate. I see, she doesn't want to show how she eats.

"Let's take out the food."

Boys with hands glittering with oil were smiling, showing their teeth. Do they still want to eat? I smiled too. I recalled my adolescence, when my grandmother was smiling with her whole face, watching as I was cheerfully eating. I feel that I know now, how she felt back then. I think that I could spend time like that all the time if I had money.

Over the last year, roaming Euro-Asia, we worked together a lot to guarantee a tranquil life for the kids, but I don't feel as if I became rich at all. The reason was being a subcontractor. It's

common in mercenary business to take subcontractor jobs. There were a lot of subcontracts of subcontracts of subcontracts. Wages of subcontracts were naturally getting so thin, that there were even times, that I wondered if working as a part-timer at a convenience store would be more profitable. There are also cases that the fact that the workers are kids is being taken advantage of.

That's why I chose Japan. I want to establish a private military company here, only in a developed country, where I don't have many rivals. Even with the law barrier for using children, without any competition, the degree of conflict is low. It surely wasn't a bad plan.

I need money. I think one more time about things I've been thinking about last year. I did my best last year to make some savings. With 26 people wages become low, but it's quite a large sum anyway. Thanks to that we're here in Japan now.

But I wonder if it was good. I got anxious. Images of people taking photographs with cellphones at the crime scene are floating across my mind. And then that way of that policeman's appreciation. Is that a country that can make those kids happy? There's no reason to complain, but I think I should have worked harder to make this country better when I was young. By properly expressing thanks for instance. By not filming a human's misfortune. That's what I mean. Even as a NEET or jobless I could do that for sure. I should have spread that behavior too.

Everybody is full. With satisfaction I pay 60 000 yens and take everyone out of the restaurant. I give them instruction to wait, and run a short way to the convenience store for a tube of packed wet tissues.

I have to wipe everyone's greasy hands from oil. When I was running back I saw Djibril, who was trotting to me. I stand at her way. Djibril moves one step back. When I looked at her, she

lowered her headgear and concealed her whole face. Apparently she's in a bad mood today.

“Let's walk together.” – I said.

She seemed like she was in a conflict, standing still for a while, then she peeked with her pretty pupils from the gap of her headgear and said that she also has black hair.

I didn't have any idea, what she was talking about.

Television debut

When I returned, boys and girls were waiting before the store, standing in two rows. For some reason Omar was also lined up, well, probably to not hinder the passage – I reflected.

“Omar, why is everyone standing in a line?”

“Haven't you told them to wait?”

“I see.” – I replied, giving everyone one wet tissue per person.

It was an obvious thing. However it was obvious in my former job, not now.

It's been an extremely short time, since I returned to Japan and common things here are bringing back the absurdities of the job. I got into a complicated mood. I wonder how many days I need, to become a normal Japanese.

Everyone's waiting for my speech. Whatever the fate is, I'm their operator. I don't hate it, but I'm sometimes uneasy about it.

I worry a lot, don't I. – I thought. I have a lot to worry about. First time in my life I have so much things to worry about. I haven't been worrying so much at work. I was even a bit proud of it.

“Wipe your hands, we're going to the hotel.” – I said.

Everyone's laughing.

"What happened?"

"It was in the television!" – said Omar as their representative.

"What was?" – I asked again.

"You."

"Did they even come to a tempura restaurant for filming?"

After I said that, Omar took an exaggerated look at everyone and started laughing with them.

"Our OO is a war hero."

The mercenary operator, in other words Omar, was saying this about me.

"Whatever happens, eyes of the golden eagle are watching from above."

"He took us to the place, no one could have thought about. Yet his wings are so strong."

Former soldier boys and girls were saying one after another, like they were singing. There is no religious scale in their song, but instead there's splendid intonation in it.

They laughed.

Former girl soldier, a pert girl Gini said:

"Charming on the surface."

Everyone is having great fun. But they are not laughing loud. They just make a smile and show their white teeth. I blinked.

Even without being able to drink alcohol I thought that their merry state is a much greater thing.

No, even after alcohol I'm not like that anyway.

Djibril stood up at the front as if she was to protect me.

"I don't understand the situation. Please explain it." – said

Djibril as my guardian angel.

Hmmm, I also had a feeling that it was too quiet, so I rallied my readiness. Distress delays decisions. It's a dangerous state – I thought. On the battlefield it kills your subordinates.

Omar said with a soft voice:

“Before, at the tempura store, there was a TV.”

“Yeah.”

“It was the news.”

“Yes, when I was leaving I think there were. It was just 9 pm after all.” – I said. Omar nodded in assent.

“Narita Airport showed up.”

I finally understood the situation.

“So we flashed there.”

“It's our first great battle result for expanding into the Japanese market. We got promotion worth several tens of thousands dollars by capturing a foolish amateur. Your operation was properly done.” – said Omar and gently smiled with truly honest, upright posture.

“We're taking a great pride.”

I felt somehow shy. It's not a conversation to do at the front of a tempura restaurant. I said it doesn't matter, so let's go to the hotel, and started walking.

“Apparently that random attacker was a member of some cult and the divorce was the reason that it happened.” – Omar gave me a rough explanation.

Conversation with the guardian angel in the subway

It couldn't be helped that the kids were curious that the vending machines were running even at night, but I hurried them to the station.

I see they all grimace at the statue on Kaminarimon and then we immediately enter the near subway station.

There are just two stations in Toei-Asakusa Line, so it's a straight line to the hotel in Asakusabashi.

We could go there even by foot, but I thought I want them to ride a metro. Anyhow, they haven't done it before.

Actually I think that for training walking would be better, but well, I reconsidered that we'll do some strolling during the day tomorrow.

Kids are talking about red paper lanterns and pagan statues.

Inside the train I lined them up not near the entrance, but at the front of the seats. Half of the kids can't reach a handrail. I said to grasp them to those who can reach it.

Old woman, who is sitting before my eyes smiled and asked in Japanese if that's a school trip. I replied that's correct and apologized for causing troubles. Old woman said it's not a trouble and that she's happy to see such lively kids.

I smiled and stretched my back. Kids and Omar are always displeased when I stand slovenly.

After some time of silence someone mildly pulled my sleeve. It was Djibril. When I smiled as gently as I could, Djibril hid her face by lowering her headgear.

I felt she was in a bad mood after all.

"What's the matter?"

"Arata is."

Djibril said my name silently in a whisper, so others wouldn't hear, after which she continued with words in which the voice

of her feelings was louder.

“Sometimes you treat me like a child.”

I thought that a year ago that girl said it's okay though. I'm often told that memory I have is good after all. In Japan I was mostly just such a person. But it didn't get me a job, that's why I wasn't actually feeling that it helped me. This time is the same case.

I make a serious face. I had a feeling that even without purposely making such a face it would become like that. Those kids probably don't remember words from a year ago. I was also embarrassed when relatives were telling me what I said in early childhood I don't remember.

“Is that so?” – in the end I said only that.

“Yes.” – She didn't want to say only this, but we arrived at the second station.

I said let's get off and did it first.

Hotel and yukata

We enter a hotel near the station. Hotel, or it would be more fitting if I'd say ryokan. Maybe it's because of a weekday, or maybe it's always like that, but it seemed that there weren't any guests except us. Three floor reinforced concrete building from Showa^[6].

As might be expected from such a cheap hotel, it was falling apart from old age. Although we don't have any complains. Not a single one. In fact we're used to shared toilets and baths. You become defenseless in toilet or bath so you feel secure if those are mass places.

Previously I thought that separate ones are better, but if you change, other things change too.

We're taking a small, medium and a large room. Medium for girls, large for boys and me with Omar.

For now we're not using the small one, but if boys are going to make noise at night... I thought I can tolerate that much and planned to sleep there with Omar.

In fact we were very sleepy, so after establishing a sentry we immediately wanted to sleep.

"I'll be the sentry." – said Djibril.

I agreed. I wanted to say that in this country there's no need for a sentry, but directly after arriving here there was that accident, so it was hard to me to find proofs for them that Japan is safe, or I just didn't have the confidence to explain them that. Maybe I'm just getting used to Japan and incidents happening here.

"Chose one more person. You're going to change after 3 hours."

"I got it."

Normally I would ask if she's okay, if she isn't sleepy, but after that thing at the subway I couldn't say anything. I felt like asking such things would be treating her like a child.

Behind, kids were struggling with yukatas, lifting them and unfolding.

I was concerned about them same as I was about Djibril.

"I'm not sleepy anyway." – said Djibril.

I tried to look at her expression. I can't see it because of the headgear, but maybe I'll see eyes at least. She pulled her headgear as she was protecting her eyes too, hiding her face completely.

"It will stretch if you're going pull it that much." – I said.

Djibril ran off, saying nothing.

Omar turns up.

“What happened?”

“Djibril is grumpy recently.”

Omar nodded when I said that.

“She’s growing up.”

“So it’s different than puberty in Japan?”

“Arata. You’ve just said ‘puberty’ in English. It’s a little old-fashioned word, currently almost not used.”

“I see, so there is something like puberty in English?” – I said an extremely foolish thing like that with seriousness.

Omar smiled. Broad-minded smile only someone honest like him could make.

“If they live long enough and grow, that is.” – he said to me.

I thought he really got me. No, I was happy that if Djibril and everyone survived that much. I want them all to grow up if possible.

I was thinking that I haven’t been dealing with a girl in puberty before.

“What will be, will be” – said Omar quietly.

I was grateful to him. And also to his god that made me meet him.

“It’s probably right, but I’m worried, you know.”

Omar said to that, that he thinks it’s fine beyond the battlefield.

I pointed at children, who’re surveying yukatas.

“Those are kimonos”

“Well, they look like nightgowns though.”

“How about dressing them? They’ll surely be delighted.”

“Yeah... Omar.”

“What is it, my friend?”

“Thank you.”

Omar smiled.

“Which reminds me that in this country there’s a lot of ‘excuse me’, but not much ‘thank you’.” – said Omar.

“I thought about that too. I guess I’ve been with you for too long.”

“I think that the current Arata is likable.”

“That would be nice if that were true.”

I joined the boys, who were standing and watching unfolded yukatas.

I took off the jacket, unfastened my necktie and took a yukata, showing how to put it on. I tie an obi. Boys made bright eyes.

“I feel like it won’t fit for combat.” – said one of the boys. I nodded.

“Exactly. That’s why everyone doesn’t wear it, right?”

Boys were excited.

“But as a foreign custom it’s fun to wear it, isn’t it? Let’s do this everyone.”

Children were delighted.

Well, surprisingly I just thought that it’s good that I came to Japan.

I realized that girls from the next room opened the shoji^[7] a bit and are watching what we are doing. I smiled and said that I’m going to teach them a way to put it on, so try to put it on your clothes first.

Tomorrow's plans

It seems that girls in the next room were enjoying changing clothes. I hear only voices. Smiling, I thought that it would be nice if Djibril could have some fun later. Well, she probably won't take off her headgear though. Thinking about the combination of yukata and the headgear, I smile bitterly.

Even so, the growing up thing will be difficult – I thought. That troubles me, but recently I have a lot things to think about. Results which I haven't realized came up when I did my job recklessly. And along with those results, I made some kind of success.

But this success is a bit different than previous ones. It's not good if I'll keep doing it only that way. That's why I felt like I was at the point, in which I hit a wall.

That's difficult – I think. And it's not like it's only my problem. It's different than my life, in this case I can't let myself enjoy the fall.

“Where shall we go tomorrow?” – I said.

Around half of the boys were already sleeping in the lined up futons.

“I thought about sightseeing.” – said Omar, who has been already lying down. I lied down as well.

“Yeah, but where.”

“Whatever the place I'll be happy”

“I know. But I want something which will make you even more happy.”

Because of the time difference I was falling asleep, so I said that, while being pulled into sleep already. Omar smiled and I think he said it's their good fortune that they have met me, but I don't know if it was a dream or reality.

I already went asleep, but I also woke up early. Light isn't shining through the gap in the curtain. Is it still night? If it's night, I wonder what time is it. Since I returned to Japan I've been thinking that I need to buy a wristwatch and sneakers. And a suit.

Right, I had to decide where we will go sightseeing.

Even 10 years after opening, Tokyo Skytree is still a popular sightseeing spot. I think it'll be good to climb it. I went to the corridor heading to the toilet, thinking about waking everyone up.

By the window in the hallway there's Djibril in a yukata. She was illuminated by the light of the moon or some neon. I immediately know it's her because of the design of the headgear.

"You haven't changed shifts with anybody?" – I said, walking up to her.

She shook her head and looked at me.

"I can't sleep."

I gave up asking if it's a jet lag. I remembered words which say that during growing up wherever you step there are land mines.

"That's a problem." – I said just that and then that I'll be right back and went to the toilet.

I wash my hands in the bathroom^[8]. Water is cold, which satisfied me a bit. Moreover it's undoubtedly drinkable just like that. I thought it's a very nice place. Right, I also should buy a water filter. I wondered if I should make a shopping list.

I slowly went back to the window in the corridor. Djibril was standing and waiting for me there.

"Anything suspicious?"

“Nothing for now. But there is a possibility that someone performed reconnaissance on us.”

“Why have you thought that?”

My mind immediately becomes clear. Djibril pointed outside the window. The distance between buildings is small, so it can't be seen what's outside like that. I move my head a bit and saw a road between buildings outside. It was still night, but street lights are bright.

“There was a person standing there, but quickly changed position.”

“We have to think if anyone needs to observe us in the first place.”

I considered a possibility that Immigration Bureau is acting. No, I guess it's not that.

“Anything else?”

“Nothing. It could be in fact a reconnaissance, I don't know.”

“I see. Are we increasing the number of sentries?”

“Increase it to 4 people.”

“Thank you. A Perfect response.”

I noticed that I was in a dress shirt. How sloppy of me. Since I've been working at the private military company I was always in a suit. Djibril unexpectedly took off her headgear. Shook the head and set her hair. I find it amazing that by such a simple thing like shaking head she could fix her hair like that.

They have grown a bit – I thought. Skinny face. I feel like the cheeks were more fluffy before, but there is a high possibility that's just my impression.

Without looking at me, Djibril touched her head and said:

“My hair is black too, Arata.” – she said, like it was a very

important thing for her.

“I know.” – I said.

Djibril looked at me and lowered her eyes down a little.

“In that case, it’s okay.”

I thought about stroking Djibril’s head, who was looking embarrassed. Is this a puberty’s landmine? It’s complicated. Complicated, but if she grows even more I won’t be able to do such things – I thought and stroke her head.

This is a moment, which won’t happen again. Djibril seems annoyed, but she kept silent.

“Rest, Djibril.”

“Is this an order, Arata?”

“I don’t want to give you an order.”

After hesitating, she looked up at me through a gap between her disarranged hair.

“If you stroke me one more time I will go to sleep. Please do it more gently.”

“Sorry. Did it hurt?”



I was stroking with caution. In a way to fix her hair again. Oh, yes, my cute child – I was satisfied with myself.

And then I went back to bed. Sleeping in time when you can sleep is also work for a professional.

Morning and good luck

It became morning. I woke up. My body was still sleepy but I wake it by physical exercise. When you are a mercenary you understand how important is exercise.

Right. I'll record a radio calisthenics. I want an English version if there's one. – I thought. It's certainly a popular thing in the business world.

It's 6 o'clock. At 8 I'll tell them to go to the 2nd floor's hall – zashiki (tatami room). That's breakfast time.

I was concerned about free 2 hours till breakfast, I can't call it nothing but waste. Everyone probably thinks the same.

“Let's go for a walk. Gather at the entryway as soon you prepare your clothes. Leave your baggage.”

Everybody gathered in 5 minutes at the entryway. Djibril put on her headgear as if nothing had happened, but as she wears it I obviously couldn't see her expression.

I drew a route with a red ball-point pen on four maps of the neighborhood which I swiped by habit from the hotel lobby. I show them a route, each tactical unit S will march.

“By the end of today I'll get a radio, but till then we'll contact by a telephone in the hotel. You have the number on the maps you got.”

Everyone said they understood. I nodded.

“Sentry reports that there's a suspicion that we have been

observed. This mission will be a verification of Japanese topography, Japanese traffic and as well checking if we're being watched or have a tail. Traffic rules and signalization in Japan are as follows."

Everyone, boys and girls have serious faces. I nodded and smiled.

"Do not engage in battle in residential areas. Prioritize evacuation. That's all. Dismissed. Departure is after 60 seconds, unit every 30 seconds. We'll use the same code as you were assigned yesterday: A, C, D, E. Omar will take command of A."

Do not engage in a fight in residential areas was supposed to be a joke, but no one has laughed. Everyone started to move as instructed.

I was left alone at the hotel lobby. I take a newspaper and sit at the sofa near the pink telephone placed in the lobby. Each tactical unit moves along the route in my head. Omar's moving toward Raimon and Djibril should march now toward Sumidagawaryokudo Park. Gini toward Akihabara. This tactical unit S is the only one, which is late in crossing the checkpoint transit time. They must be moving without running. Ibn is instructed to run through narrow alleys. I did it as a test. If he's someone who can't move by a map, he can't be a leader of a tactical unit.

I glance through the newspaper, but in fact I thought that I would want an information illuminator and integrated information display. I once worked at the American private military company and that time soldiers had all information in one place. We, the operators who weren't using guns, had everything at hand, displayed at an information terminal.

I want something like that thing. With that thing accordingly dispersed you can conduct a coordinated fight. – I thought.

In Japan direct weapons are not sold, but this kind of

information weapons are nowadays much more dangerous and they're practically sold without any restrictions.

I was taking into consideration establishing a private military company in Japan as a plan B, or as a plan B of plan B, securing a technician and a supply of equipment. That made me start to think about shopping today.

There is a phone call.

"This is Gini. There is a strange signboard."

"Ignore it and proceed."

"Roger."

The phone call ended. I raised up an eyebrow. I thought about going for shopping to Akihabara today, but it could be a bit too strong of a shock for them.

I frown and look at the newspaper. Someone from the hotel greets me, saying good morning. I smiled and said the same. I take the newspaper again. It looks like I was looking at a yesterday's one. People here wake up late. It's somebody else's business so it's probably okay – I thought. I focus my attention back and read today's newspaper. Reading newspapers is neither my hobby nor a habit, but I thought it's good for killing time in the hotel lobby.

The accident at Akita has been mentioned. That got me. I stopped reading because of embarrassment. Reading is best for killing time, but today it won't work.

I thought about going for shopping today. I believe I can get everything in Akihabara, but though it's not such an electronics district like in the past, there are still maids standing, so Djibril's mood might get worse even more. For a parent, a growing up kid is like penetrating through a minefield.

I look through the lobby again. There was something nice. PC for loan, that means internet for loan. I put one 100 yen coin

and started 10 minutes of use.

Now when I think about it, it's been a long time since I used Internet. Formerly there was a time when I thought I would die without it, but that was just a fancy.

I look at Akiba Blog, which I have been watching everyday in the past, when I wanted to know what's going on in Akihabara.

I blinked with my eyes, because I saw "Real elf is here!". I scroll the screen a little more. Seems that a real elf appeared in Akihabara, walking lonely, wearing a mourning dress. I was about to push the close button, but my body shivered. No, if I close it now, it will probably get me by surprise later. Omar would probably whistle gloomily and Djibril's minefield would without a doubt explode in a chain reaction.

The one displayed on the screen was Sophie... that was Sophia. In fact an American girl, who likes forest elves with pointed ears, so she underwent a plastic surgery on them. On this point she was already beyond the category of common sense, but she was my friend and a coworker. Was a coworker ... past tense.

Indeed she's wearing a mourning dress. In silence, which isn't like her. With black clothes and even a veil with attached lace on face, but it was certainly Sophie. And I thought that it's a girl who will smile when a camera is pointed at her.

There's even an article about it.

It's written that her Japanese sweetheart died, he promised her that he would take her to the land he loved, so she came here. I couldn't bear it and pushed the close button. I was faintly breathing.

How in world did we became sweethearts? And what a bad luck is that supposed to be, that we came to Japan exactly at the same time? It doesn't seem likely that she has such a refined hobby as reading newspapers, but there's enough of a

possibility that she watches TV – I thought.

It's not like in the older days, but there are still a lot of large electronic stores, standing side by side along with expositions of TVs.

I shall give up on Akihabara.

I pondered. I feel bad for her, she was always so excited, but we can't meet again. The difference in tension or temperature is too extreme. I will probably easily break like a roof tile left on the roadside in the desert.

Djibril hates Sophie and her remodeled ears. Maybe it's because of her religion or maybe just a silly human emotion, I don't know. I'm trying as hard as I can for Djibril that entered puberty, so I didn't want to do anything that added fuel to the fire.

Problem is where we should go for shopping. Moreover, to not bump into an elf.

Paraphrasing an otaku saying: It's dark after leaving Akihabara. Where should I shop. That's a sudden problem. No, exactly in such cases, there's Internet. I'll search an appropriate place for shopping.

What I want is a wristwatch and shoes. I was troubled which words I should type into the search engine, but eventually I just wrote it like that. Ameya-Yokocho turns up.

Ameya-Yokocho, Ameyoko? I knew about it from year's end news, but haven't been there. It's close to Ueno-okachimachi? I went to Ueno Park immediately after we came to Tokyo. – I thought.

Apart from that, a blossom viewing. I remember I went to Ueno Park for blossom viewing when I was a member of the small design company. Socializing back then was hard for me. I wonder what about now. I feel like I haven't changed in that

matter very much, but I felt like I could socialize. I don't care whatsoever. Small design company went bankrupt, and I got a job at a mercenary company under the name of a private military company. Then my life rapidly took a plunge. I even enjoy it.

I push the close button. There's a joy in falling down with a bang, which only people who experienced it understand. Thinking about it my thoughts returned to Sophie again.

Very well. Ameyoko it is then.

△1. In Japan and US (from what I know) you count ground floor as a 1st floor. So 4th floor here would be like 3rd floor in Europe for argument's sake. Not like it's relevant to the story.

△2. Ryokan – a traditional Japanese inn duh.

△3. This one can be confusing. Arata here is mentioning a manga/anime cliché that a girl falls in love with the guy that rescued her. So he points out that she thanked him and that's all, no thank you coffee, no continuation, nothing (according to him anyway).

△4. Karameishi – only name, eventually cellphone. No address or anything else for that matter. Used by hostesses in bars that just started or are employed short-term (for example).

△5. Mizushobai – water trade, a term for Japanese night-time entertainment like hostess bars, cabaret clubs and others.

△6. This chapter is a nightmare with translation notes. Honestly I didn't even bother with location names or common known terms like tempura or yukata. Don't know them, google it. As for the 3 floor Showa reinforced concrete building I have no friggin idea how to put it in English.

△7. Shoji – the sliding partition thingie in Japan.

△8. A place from where you take water. Watering hole or

watering-place, but hey bathroom works and once again it is absolutely irrelevant to the story.

Chapter 2

Studying Japan at a cheap hotel

Japanese breakfast

Away group returned at the instructed time. It's 7:50 now. None of the tactical units has been late.

“How was it?”

“There was a pretty riverbank.” – said Djibril with a somewhat cheerful voice.

“There were big red lights we saw yesterday” – said Omar, nodding deeply.

“It was like a maze.” – said Ivan while blushing.

“... I was shocked.” – was the only thing that Gini said.

Each of the four of them was listening to other reports with puzzlement. I smiled and said that's all what Japan is.

“OK... I'll listen to everyone's stories after we eat. Before that tell me if you had a tail or something?”

I've been walking, saying it without much expectations. Even if we have a tail, something like that is beyond our expertise, even as specialists in military affairs. Three of the leaders replied that they don't know if they had a tail, but one – Ivan, said that he thinks he had one.

Course which Ivan was taking had the most complicated roads from all of the routes. It was a way that is mostly hard to pass even for cars.

“I took a wrong road once and turned back.” – said Ivan in embarrassment. “A person I saw there was very surprised. A young woman. She had black hair.”

“Not an old woman?” – I asked. Ivan shook his head and said he’s positive.

I nodded.

“OK, thanks.”

“What are you going to do?” – said Omar, removing his sunglasses and looking at me.

“Well, there’s nothing to do.” – I said.

We reached a dining room. In fact rather than a dining room it was a reception hall. Food is lined on the long table.

It was genuine Japanese food, but with spoons and forks attached. Being grateful for the consideration I took the seat in the middle. Omar sat in front. On my left and right sits Djibril and Gini. Ivan sat hidden next to Omar.

“Why do you say that there’s nothing to do?” – said Omar, gazing at the small for him rice bowl.

After saying itadakimasu and putting my hands together I said:

“Enemy is intelligent and cautious.”

If war is one of the ways of diplomacy, this enemy shows a very refined manner of negotiation. Steadily observes and then acts. Or doesn’t act. Like Djibril and Gini who are hiding and peeping at me. Whether it’s a tail or a headgear the only thing different is the method. If I said it was favoritism that would be the end of the story, but I sincerely wanted to get along with Djibril and find something common with her.

“If the enemy is bright, isn’t it even more proper to do something?”

Gini doesn’t care much about the religious precepts. She takes off her headgear during a meal. She has curly red hair and big eyes. She looks at me with great interest. I smiled.

“Being bright means you can’t afford to be stupid. I think the enemy political position is complicated.” – I replied.

“He is in position in which he can’t attack?” – said Ivan and added after that: “That’s sanctified^[1], isn’t it?”

I nod. There’s no pork. I’ve been checking the menu since a few days ago. It’s not like the meal is made by a certified chef, but as someone from the secular world I’m not picky.

“He is in a position in which he can’t attack, but he makes reconnaissance. I wonder why.”

Gini with a bright face is poking her chopsticks into a salted salmon.

“It’s red.”

“It’s alright. That’s a kind of salmon.”

Gini ate the salmon and nodded. She seems pleased. I smiled and looked at the worried Djibril and Omar.

“To put it simple, he doesn’t take us as a threat. However I guess he just watches us.” – I said. Omar frowns.

“For now we’re just honest travelers.”

“Exactly. Actually we plan to do this for a while. That’s why we can ignore it for now. I have a few cards in my sleeve after that, but whichever I chose, it’s not the thing to do now.”

Djibril nodded.

“I trust you Arata.”

“Me too!”

“Me too.” – Ivan and Gini said one after another.

Late, but Omar says it too. Just so you know – he said. I laughed.

“I know all of that. It’s okay. Situation is not that serious.” – Not like in Djibril or Sophie’s case – I added in my mind. If I

had to add more – I'm here now because everyone says that they believe in me.

I looked thoroughly. It seems like majority considers rice as a non-sweet sweet, so they've decided to eat it after finishing everything else. I eat rice together with other things. I've noticed that they don't have a concept of the so-called side-dish.

I thought about how am I going to explain it to them.

To Ueno

After 15 minutes of the meal I decided to go to Ameyoko. But even if I go now, the stores probably won't be open yet, so I chose to take them to Ueno. Zoo should be fine. Some other place would be okay too – I thought.

There's around 2 km from Asakusabashi to Ueno. If I add to this our destination it will be 3 km. Speed of marching is 6 km per hour, so it's 30 minutes. However since we wear light equipment now, I want to make it in 25 minutes.

Departure from the hotel at 8:30. We started moving in 4 rows.

I change teams during the travel and make leaders of the boys and girls who haven't done it before. Commanding 5 subordinates and walking isn't as easy as one might think. I instructed them to count every red thing along the way, except cars. Later I plan to verify their reports. Key is how to use subordinates.

After passing the vicinity of Mitsui Memorial Hospital and crossing the Kuramaebashi-Dori there is a place full of one way traffic alleys. I gave Omar a challenge, asking how he would deploy troops if he were the commander of boys and girls. I walked, smiling. I sweat a bit. Sweating during the exercise

makes a man feel a little better. That's why I've put aside my troubles and walked, counting red things.

Djibril walks behind me. Almost trotting she asked if we're still being watched.

"That's obvious." – I laughed and continued.

"I wonder if enemy will get support if something happens. It seems that they don't have much personnel for this." – I said.

I felt that Djibril got close and looking up at me, she said:

"Does Arata know who is the enemy?"

"Setting aside that I don't know if it's the enemy, yes."

"Who? Who is that? You won't tell me?"

Walking, I looked at Djibril. Her eyes peeking from the headgear were looking at me. I smiled. Why are you so worried – thinking, I reflected that it would be better if I didn't tell this girl about my worries.

"It's someone from Japanese government, it concerns public safety." – I said.

"It's about us?"

"In some way I guess, but I wonder how much."

"Does the enemy think about what we can do with such forces? Or recognize Arata's true strength?"

I grinned.

"If enemy had properly valued my strength, watching us wouldn't be necessary, right?"

Objectively my career is a one big fall. It's not worth appreciation.

"Arata" – after Djibril said it, she casted down her eyes."Even with golden eagle's wings and eyes you neglect it."

“Thank you for appreciation.” – I said, smiling bitterly.

Djibril lowered her headgear and concealed her eyes.

Smiling, I think about hardships of adolescence. Adolescence, huh? That’s a convenient word – I thought. I’m afraid that I put blame for every slightest mistake at adolescence.

We’ve reached Ueno Station. We pass the park’s gate. I look at a group of students, who apparently came here on the school trip. Similar age to Djibril and the others. I guess middle schoolers – I thought and looked at them. They have elementary schooler’s innocence and awareness of a high schooler. They’re between that age. Small group of students with pimples, incomplete – standing between being cute and beautiful.

With a sidelong glance at a happily chatting big group I looked at my kids. I thought about what will happen if I have let those children go to school.

“We are almost there. It’s here.” – I said.

I didn’t plan to do this. I didn’t intend to show them the difference of environment. I bit my lips.

Djibril looks at my side.

“Arata. There are children, rather small.”

“I think they’re in a similar age to all of you.”

“I don’t think so. I mean...” – she said, without looking at the middle schoolers.

“Their faces are so relaxed.”

Is she comforting me? Djibril is my guardian angel after all – I thought.

Gini ran up to me. Excited, she lined up between me and Djibril.

“Have you seen those forces?”

“It’s a group.”

“It was as big as a tactical unit C, but it doesn’t have a leadership.”

Gini said with excitement. Those eyes are saying we’re better.

“Well, if they had won with us that would be a problem.”

“Now I know the reason why we’re being watched.”

Gini said it as she had understood everything. I laughed.

“So, have you two seen the whale?”

They stood and shook their headgears.

“Ok, all units. We’re dashing now, hurry up!”

I run off. I feel that my body wants to run away from school trip students. Deep inside I feel completely defeated. I thought that I need money.

Whale

In Ueno park, already from the entrance of the JR Ueno Station spreads a zone of museums and art galleries. Amongst them there is also National Museum of Nature and Science.

On the grounds of National Museum of Nature and Science there is a model of a female blue whale in 1:1 scale.

Just the huge size of this was enough to catch boys and girls breath. I laughed a bit because of it.

“It’s a huge fish.” – one of the boys murmured, fully satisfying me.

“It’s a mammal. Same like camel, horse, human or elephant. It’s a model with actual size.”

“In that case, isn’t everything the same?” – Said around 10

year old boy.

I found it quite a difficult question. I thought that when it comes to teaching kids, you must learn yourself first.

“Animals which produce milk are mammals.” – I said.

I said that like in the case of camels and humans, mothers give milk. I don't know why boys and girl have frozen. Is it a cultural difference? I don't know it too well. One of the kids, said on behalf of everyone: “Milk comes from this fish too? How does it do it in the water?”

I was about to say that of course, but hesitated instantly. I was wondering how whales were doing it. I looked at an information board beside it. It's alright – I thought.

Everyone gave me a wry smile.

“This museum will open up in 10 minutes. Till that time let's observe the whale and the locomotive engine.” – I said.

Because they got permission, immediately each tactical unit moved their unit. Kids are in high spirits. They don't make noise and behave like that to know it just from looking, but I can understand from the atmosphere.

I watch this, forgetting about giving instructions to move from that spot. Omar came near me and looked at the same scene.

“When you spend time like that, you lose motivation to work don't you.”

In our case work means war. I nodded in full agreement.

Seriously. I will think for many years that it would be better if they had just arrested us when we entered the country.

In the National Museum of Nature and Science kids were having a lot of fun. However while everyone was making wide eyes, watching dinosaur fossils I myself made a sort of discovery. There are things written on the information board I didn't know.

Things too obvious, not even worth a bitter smile, but I wasn't particularly distressed by it. There's no need to find answers for everything. It's like this information board, isn't it better to just buy a book, where the answer is written? – I thought.

Japan is surprisingly a major country when it comes to publishing books.

I entrusted this place to Omar and went to the museum shop.

For starters I bought a picture book with whales. I intend to explain breastfeeding with it. When I was smiling, I saw a familiar woman standing next to me. It was that impressive long black hair.

“Were you able to buy a cellphone?”

“I have to do it, but before that I thought about explaining breastfeeding of whales to the kids.” – I said frankly.

Standing next to me, she slightly laughed. So she's wearing ordinary clothes. Long skirt and simple blouse with a cardigan on it.

“That's a shame. I thought we could exchange phone numbers.”

She said it, as if she really felt regret. I glimpsed at her direction and smiled.

“Right. Today afternoon I'm not going to shop at Akihabara, but at Ameyoko nearby. I'll buy it together with shoes, wristwatch and a suit. I think it will be a prepaid cell phone though.”

“Thank you very much. I appreciate that.” Ms. Ito bowed her head.

“It’s nothing.”

I smiled. We encountered each other faster than I thought. I feel that it’s too early to sound a warning, but it doesn’t seem well if the opposite side puts cards on the table. I thought about it from the perspective of an enemy.

Also holding a book in her hands, Ms. Ito said quietly:

“I heard that the police department in Chiba will send a letter of gratitude.”

“I just wanted a word of gratitude during the investigation. That’s all, I got it, we’re even.”

Ms. Ito is looking at me. It is said that Asian people look young, but indeed with just different clothes she looks younger. I continued: “It’s bad for kid’s education. I have to properly teach them that doing good deeds is worth praising. If that gap will be empty, even if they’re going to be praised the effect will be halved.”

After staring at me, she suddenly laughed. It was a natural laugh. She shrugged her shoulders, returned the book and said: “I’m surprised. You’re different than it was stated in the documents.”

I picked up a picture book with dinosaurs which I planned to give to Omar.

“Thank you. This is what I’m in reality.”

“But I hope you don’t become an enemy of Japan.”

“But that’s just between us.” – I said to Ms Ito. “We’re unarmed.”

She burst into laughter.

“Yes, I know.” – She said just that.

I shyly looked around. I see that Djibril comes running.

“I’m very glad we’ve met. Don’t forget about a cellphone.”

“Even without it, I am not going to do anything bad. If I do, I’ll talk to you before that.” – I said honestly.

I thought it would be good if she takes that words as they are.

If they’re going to take the children and if they give them legal permission to stay I can’t ask for me.

I took them to this place, but I was severely crushed by this past few hours. I was thinking that rather than saving money I want to borrow aid from this country and send those children to school.

If only I would be able to borrow it.

“Of course. Forgive me. Organizational system of our organization is different, so we can’t communicate directly, but I will unofficially notify the prefectural police.”

Ms. Ito smiles and disappears after paying at the cash register. She bought a book with whales.

Gasping Djibril

Djibril had to rush here so much, that she was out of breath.

After buying the picture book in a hurry, I sat here on a bench.

“Are you okay?”

I haven’t seen such Djibril even on the battlefield. She’s breathing hard. She probably ran too fast.

“Who is that person?”

“Who?”

“Person with whom you were talking with friendly.” Rather

than scowling, she's gazing at me.

"Ah, Ms. Ito? See, Ivan said she's the one who he saw. I think she's the one who was following us. Seems like she thought that she saw a familiar face, so she promptly contacted me."

I collected my thoughts, explaining it to Djibril. I thought that talking with people means putting in order your own thoughts. Djibril looked away and said: "I know that much."

I smiled.

"You're still gasping. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay."

After some hesitation, Djibril nervously took off her headgear. She's looking at me. Her face is red.

"What will you do if we're going to be attacked?"

"You said that the enemy is cautious, right? Enemy won't take such measures just like that."

Is she sweating? She looked at me, hiding her wet forelock.

"Arata is" – she stopped and cast down her eyes. "Sometimes too prejudiced."

Maybe – I thought. Or perhaps I should say "indeed".

Suddenly I became embarrassed. I've been convinced that I was right, but I've been mistaken. A narrow solution can be a big error. I've learnt that for sure in exchange for the population of one village.

And yet. No, I guess that's it. It's exactly it – I rebuked myself for trying to find excuses. It's not supposed to be said at an age of 31, but I have to become an adult. Without excuses.

"Sorry." – I said just that.

There is a part in me which intends to be unconditionally a great person toward children – I thought. This is also a

reflection.

By finding those two problems my mood slightly improved.

My mood improved probably because Djibril was out of breath. I don't know. I thought that whatever the cause I will do my best. One by one, till I find a good conclusion.

Djibril looks at me and puts on her headgear. Before that I felt that her face became even more red.

I must have had a very stupid face, thinking about all those things. I must be more mature so that Djibril and the rest won't be embarrassed by me.

Ameyoko and a cellphone

Around 11 o'clock the kids have gathered. They seemed more fatigued than after a battle. Perhaps there are kids who still wanted to watch exhibits, but I thought that there are also ones among girls who probably have enough. For instance like Djibril, who must have looked for me in the free time.

"How was it?" – I asked and everyone has uniformly remained silent. I thought that it would have been better if I had made assembly time around 10.

"There was a lot of things. Really a lot." – said Ivan, like he was squeezing it out of himself. I thought that he had something particular in mind.

Standing next to him, Gini looks up at me.

"I was shocked..."

"What shocked you?"

"Big lizard."

"I see."

"I thought about catching one in the desert and raising it."

I will have a lot to teach them – I thought. Well, at least I have the picture book I bought. Although I wasn't happy when teachers made me write an essay with a summary of my impressions, I want to make them do it, it's stronger than me. This time won't come back again and having some written memories is very precious, so it was stuff I wanted to read and collect.

“I want to show you an American museum.” – said Omar silently to me.

“Good idea. Let's go there next time.” – I said it and laughed. If there's an objective, there's also motivation to hang on.

And then we went toward Ueno-okachimachi, to Ameyoko.

Ameyoko is a shopping district. It extends between Ueno and Okachimachi, that's why it's called Ueno-okachimachi, which makes a 400 meters long shopping street. It's also said that number of stores is 380. Apparently less than before, but for me that number is still too high.

“It's like a bazaar.” – said Djibril happily. Everyone's eyes are telling that they feel that too. Even with a different religion, climate and customs, shopping districts are probably much the same.

I gave each of them around 3000 yen for spending. Order is “Shop until you spend it all”. I thought that shopping will also have an educational purpose. Well, I guess that there are few soldiers who're using up all ammunition if ordered to do it. They always take insurance. Probably each one will be left with 300-500 yen. Well, that's good.

Reshuffled tactical units have moved. Fixing members isn't too good. I switched them, because I've been ensuring that they will be more flexible according to the situation. War and battle will inevitably bring losses. I always have to take into consideration that part of them will die, but even so I have to

confirm that they won't lose their combat strength.

And again... my mood fell down.

After deciding the assembly time and place, everyone spread out. Djibril stuck with me.

"I told each tactical unit to move." – after saying that, Djibril stood before me, methodically pulling down her headgear.

"I'm doing it. My tactical unit S is for protecting Arata."

After I thought about that I told them to move freely I laughed bitterly.

"What about shopping?"

"I've already done it."

Djibril show me a small hand-mirror. Truly a thing a girl would buy. I was a bit hurt. I don't know myself why. Probably I noticed that I haven't been letting her do things, which girls usually do.

"I'm going to buy a cell phone." – I said and went toward a place, where there are Docomo and au shops. Wondering which one I should visit, I enter the closest one.

Even if I wanted to buy just 6 sim cards I was declined. It seems that even with an ID it's no good. There's possibility that they are going to be used for crime – that's why I've been refused. I see. That's right. – I think. Practically we're that criminals. Although without cell phones it will be hard. Radio would also be good, but without a license the output signal will be very limited. Short calling distance from the point of degree of operation freedom would be restrained. After all in the city cell phones are a necessity.

"Sorry, but find Omar for me." – I say and Djibril nods, giving a hand signal. I saw other members disperse and hide skillfully.

"Hide skillfully " is my honest impression. Nearby, Djibril is

looking up at me. I saw her gaze and smiled.

“I’m glad you came with me. Thank you.” – Djibril shook her headgear and looked the other way. I thought that she probably was fed up with selfish adult behavior.

“Black hair may strike again.” – Djibril said it with a tone like that thing was exactly the threat. It’s not an assassin – I think. If anything, it’s an agent. However I wonder if someone in her age would understand such explanation. Growing up is difficult – I thought.

Two minutes later Omar has showed up, holding a single takoyaki in hand.

“It’s good if it’s not burnt.” – when I said that, Omar let out vapor from his mouth. His lips were moving like that for 3 seconds, but he didn’t make any sound aside from the released air. I just nodded humbly.

Around 10 seconds later, Omar said that he didn’t think that it’s such a dangerous food. I look at Djibril. She turned her face away. Growing up is tough – I think, putting on an earnest expression.

“Well, putting that aside, I want to get a cellphone, but you can’t purchase many sim cards at once, you see.”

“You want to do it yourself? What now?”

“I want us to do some hopping^[3] together.” I don’t know how it’s “hopping” in English, that’s why I could express it only in such words.

“What does “hopping” mean?” – said Omar, poking quietly takoyaki with a toothpick.

“Well, something like visiting several places I guess.”

“I see. It’s a slang.” – said Omar and came along with me.

Starting with adjoining stores, together with Omar we

purchased a sim card each from three stores. Now it's time to buy cell phones themselves. It would be okay to purchase them from different stores, but I wanted same models if possible. Handling is different in each one, so it will be hard to instruct everyone. There's nothing better than uniform equipment.

I search for a small store. I found a small one which specialized in second-hand cellphones. I purchased 6 phones, with modifiable LCD, which can be used over blister packs even with gloves. There wasn't any selling restrictions in this store. Sim cards weren't associated with phones for a few years now, but thankfully it became very convenient. Not traditional folding phones, which can be seen only in Japan, but straightforward ones. It had more than necessary functions for military use.

"You've saved me, thanks."

"What're you talking about. Next I'm going to eat taiyaki." – said Omar in return grinning and walked away.

When we gave away phones during the walk, Djibril brought along a member from a different tactical unit. It seems that they intended to buy and immediately consume all food. Or perhaps they delicately stopped their pointless action of guarding me.

And then we eventually became alone with Djibril. She looked at me.

"Please don't tell me to go away."

"I'm not going to."

Shaking her headgear, she pondered a while and nodded.

Me and Djibril set off. I wonder where shall we go.

"Do you want to eat something?"

"I think I ate this morning."

“Well, that’s right. Yes.”

I felt like all my plans died. So what now.

“Is there something you want to buy?”

“I want a handgun.” – instant reply.

“In this country it’s hard to get one to begin with.” – I said as we walked. Djibril is following me one step behind.

I recall a place, where I was being held captive, long time ago in the village in Central Asia. Back then Djibril was walking three steps behind me. Since yesterday she walks one step behind. Soon, she will walk ahead of me – I thought. Despite that I want that to happen, at the same time I hate myself for feeling slightly down because of it. I need to get back me, who was pushing the blue button without hesitation.

“I need a weapon.” – she said. Maybe because of this crowd of people, she followed behind me as to not separate from me “Why?”

“I must protect Arata.” – she said stubbornly looking down.

I made contact with an enemy, or I should say – something that protects Japan, but it seems it was a great shock for her.

“Forgive me it’s not about weapon, but I’m going to a bookstore. Are you coming with me?”

“Why do you ask me about it?”

Here we go, adolescence. It becomes troublesome.

“It’s a bit of a walk.” – I said innocuously. Djibril looks suspicious.

“Is something wrong with walking?”

“Well...” – it’s obvious that you walk to a place you need to go to in her birthplace. I scratched my head with embarrassment.

“If you don’t like me, just say it.”

“Djibril. I haven’t told you before, but now I will be honest. I love you all and want to protect you.”

“...I knew it from a long time ago.”

“So why are you saying such things?”

I looked at Djibril. From the headgear I saw that her eyes were full with tears. In that moment she ran off.

Is that my fault? I’ve reached Ueno Station with a feeling of dissatisfaction.

I bought a platform ticket and entered the station. There’s quite a big bookstore here. Book Express. Before, when I was still in Japan, I was dropping by here after work, but now I have a feeling like it’s a lie. Back then I was coming here to buy LN and graphic novels. But now it’s different. I’m here to look for a book about how parents deal with their adolescent children. With confidence I can ignore the right corner with magazines and the left one with comics. I aimed at the middle shelf, close to the inner wall and tackled it. I search the book.

An old woman nearby is looking at me and smiles. I saw her gaze but didn’t look back.

“If it’s cellphone number, I’ll tell you. All 6 of them. “- that’s all I said. Old woman is smiling.

“You have such good memory, don’t you?”

“It’s not like memorizing a map. Just numbers from enumeration. It’s not a big deal.”

“But it seems that you also remember me.”

“There are not many refined old women in the metro past 21 in Japan. Though I don’t know if I should say this to Japanese.”

“You look like Japanese.”

“I have also Japanese blood and was born and raised here.”

“But your heart is somewhere beyond this country?”

“No. There’s no such thing as a country in my heart. If that country protects my children however, it’s a different story.”

“You answered without hesitation.”

“Is it something to be hesitant about?”

As I was thinking that this person asks strange questions, the old woman laughed a little.

“Right. By the way, do you realize that there is a power which protects Japan?”

“In the past I didn’t know about that.”

“Now, you know?”

“Vaguely, lot of things happened. I don’t think I can protect or improve this country, while hoping all the time for enemy’s incompetence or a coincidence.”

“Right. It doesn’t concern work but what are your thoughts about it?”

“I don’t have any specific ones. If possible I want to protect my children with this strength. I don’t have anything else.”

“Irrelevant things don’t matter. I wonder if all people who get money from war are like that.”

“I don’t think like that. I just don’t have any thoughts.”

“You’re from a vocational school, but you look much smarter than that.”

Obviously, they’ve checked my personal history. Good job – I thought. Although their opinion about me seems unexpectedly high.

“Things taught in school alone are not everything.”

I destroyed a village once, basing my judgment about the world only on my own thoughts, which were based only on the

world that I saw with my own eyes. That time I've noticed. My thoughts were not divine. Since then I'm an atheist. At least I'm not worshiping my own thoughts.

"And here I am, just about to read a book to learn something."

"I wonder if I disturbed?"

"No. If you can I want you to give me some recommendations. I'm looking for a book about how to deal with an adolescent daughter."

"Are you serious?"

"From the bottom of my heart."

Listening to my words the old woman spontaneously laughed. It was a very youthful and cheerful laugh.

"Let's leave it to subordinates. And please give them those telephone numbers too."

"Thank you very much. I'm sorry, for taking tax money."

"The book is from my pocket money. It's not a workplace, where there are inspections, but a dam collapses from a small hole. You know this right?"

"I found out that moral values are important."

"That's right. But still it's surprising. To think that the famous in mercenary world children user^[4] thinks about them." The old woman, without hesitation spoke about my downfall.

When she said "children user" I didn't change my expression or anything. I thought that also scorning everyday at my own fall means something.

"It's just that there's no other way to live" – I replied. "There's a lot of more wretched jobs than a mercenary. I mean choosing children was the best choice. If you want an even better choice please use Japan's strength in Central Asia."

“That’s impossible. There’s no understanding among citizens.”

I remained silent. Old woman smiles and points at a bookshelf. She stood at the place with a shelf, which has a lot kinds of new books offering for sale in Japan.

“How many of them exactly explains things about Central or Central-East Asia?”

I kept silent. I don’t know what she was thinking, but the old woman smiled.

“Well, you’ve passed.”

“I don’t intend to be tested.”

“And I didn’t intend to do so, youngster.”

“Thanks a lot.”

“You’re so full of energy.”

“No, I just don’t feel grateful when someone looks down on me.”

“But you got angry.”

“That’s what you do in your job, but what angered me is the lack of interest among Japanese people.”

“Weren’t you once the same?”

“Yes, I was.”

I didn’t forget about that. I remembered how my tears withered completely at the outskirts of the village.

“That’s why I got angry.”

“But it’s okay to not deny one’s past. There’s no need to hate Japanese, like there’s no need to hate one’s past, right?”

The old woman is looking at me. Despite her age, she has pretty eyes.

“Perhaps some day they will realize the truth like you. Perhaps they will grow up.”

So is this an organization that keeps watch, so maybe it will never come?

I see. Now I understand. Organization, which I’m dealing with is one of this typical to Japan feminine organization. With mother’s tolerance, it gently keeps protecting this country and citizens. This organization has that deep, great refinement which I felt from my mother as a child.

I sigh. I felt like it was an adolescent child talking towards a mother. But I’m the one who pretends to be an adult and the country is like the adolescent child.

“I wonder if you understood.”

“Well, I don’t know if I grasped it as you expect me to do it.”

“You’re a smart Japanese. It will be fine.”

“Forgive me for being a son who doesn’t pay his living expenses.”

“It’s not under your jurisdiction, so you don’t have to apologize.”

I had mixed feelings. Even if it feels like a mother, isn’t it this country organization after all?

Those women and me [\[5\]](#)

Standing around and talking in the bookstore could be a hindrance for others, so I said that we shall talk in the coffee lounge nearby.

“Sure. See you. You can continue there.” – The refined old woman says and smiles.

While wondering why we can’t go together, I entered the cafe

first. At the window seat, there is Ms. Ito, strangely stiffening her shoulders.

I ordered coffee, which I received on the tray and sat nearby. Together with Ms. Ito I looked outside the window. She looked a little different than before. This time she had a black suit. It wasn't probably a recruit suit^[6], but it made me remember times, when I was desperately looking for a job.

“Please continue.” – said Ms Ito, reading the book about whales.

“You have a pretty nape when you raise your hair.”

She concealed the back of her neck with a book and turned red. I look at her surprised.

I sipped the coffee. Oh no, my thoughts are completely leaking outside.

“Forgive me if I surprised you.”

“Ah, no. We were going to continue, so...” – said Ms. Ito embarrassed, still concealing with both her hands the back of her neck with a book.

I wonder if it's good to stand out like that in this job – I thought.

I imagine that she undoubtedly is one of those people whose work is not appreciated even in her workplace, or is it that her workplace has such low standards for personnel. When I think she's similar to Sophie it's even kind of charming. I cooled down, wondering at the same time if I will be able to get in touch with Sophie.

“Well then... continue.” - said Ms Ito, lowering her hair and tying it up. I thought about what I should say.



“Well, it’s a delicate matter, but I think that about seventy percent of your monitoring of us is pointless.

“Pointless... Isn’t it a good thing? I think that means it’s peaceful.” – she gently said. In her words could be sensed an implicit meaning: Don’t cause any trouble. I gave a grim smile.

She doesn’t trust me. Well, I haven’t been paying taxes for a while here, so it can be said it’s obvious.

“In that case it’s alright, but if you expect something I have to disappoint you.”

“Indeed, when you made a march drill, I was a bit confused. I’m sorry.”

“Ah, don’t be. I didn’t mean to. I’m the one who should be sorry. Suddenly making them lead an idle life is bad for education I suppose.”

“That’s for sure.” – she said, embarrassed. I looked at her. She didn’t turn her eyes away, but looked very embarrassed.

“If it’s beyond your jurisdiction I want you to say it, but if this children apply for, let’s say a political asylum could you get it through?”

She opened a book about whales. Thinking, she says:

“I think I couldn’t. Even if I try to rely on a NGO and make a humanitarian appeal, it’ll be difficult. Currently people from various nations are surging to this country. To the extent it becomes a social issue.”

“I see. That’s a shame.”

“My superior was concerned about illegal entry, worrying that you might make a terrorist company under the name of a private military company.”

I made a distant look. No, probably I’ve been doing it already for a while. I look around restlessly.

“I get it, but is that profitable in Japan?”

“Well, I guess not.”

I smiled faintly, thinking that it would be nice if you could live from that, even if it wouldn't be too profitable.

Since we're being watched and illegally reside here, if I plan to set up a company, that means I first need to deal with those women. I made a bitter smile.

“I think that too.”

“Well, that's right.”

And so both of us dejected took a sip of coffee. Reality is quite harsh. Mercenaries, things like intelligence agencies, everything.

Holding a cup with both hands, Ms. Ito said:

“I... was thinking that you might have come to Japan to undertake a job.”

“You mean, a military one?”

“Yes.”

“Unfortunately not.” I smiled bitterly. “I thought about ten percent would be giving this children lives, in which they don't need to hold a gun, but not more.”

“What about the remaining ninety percent?”

“I just wanted to show them this country, for their education.”

“You love them, don't you, children-user. Can I call you children-lover^[7] from now on?”

“Help yourself.”

“Thank you, children-lover. Even with great deficits, you want to educate them? How nice, I wanted to be like that when I grow up.”

She said it in a way, that I didn't know if it's praise or sarcasm. I thought about what to say.

"You can take it as you want, but it's not a lie."

"I feel the same. Boss said that you don't look like you strayed to the extent of making military movements in your home country."*

"Thanks a lot."

When I hear something like that I want to oppose it. But, that's exactly adolescence – I thought and keep silent. Adolescence at 31 is embarrassing.

Ms. Ito is looking at me from under her brows. Behavior of this person is in some way cute.

"...So, well, there's one more option."

"Option? For us?"

"Yes. Won't you try working for us?"

That was unexpected. I raised an eyebrow.

"There's nothing odd in this. Whether we hire someone ourselves or a contractor it would be better to hire a Japanese, especially if you're going to be employed by someone anyway. Such things also happen."

"Thank you. This time when I finish a decent job I'll pay taxes. However, we're not taking any dangerous things."

"Because you're a children-lover, right?" – said Ms. Ito smiling. I smiled bitterly.

"That's right. I'm sorry. You even bothered to introduce me to a job."

"It's nothing. I like people like you. Here, have this."

She gave me a bookmark of the bookstore, which was put inside the book.

“What is it?”

I take the bookmark. At the back there was a micro SD card affixed.

I see. Nicely done – I thought.

“There are details about the job.”

“Em... did you listen to me?”

“I did. It’s up to your strategic skills, how dangerous it will be. How about taking this into consideration and deciding then?”

“Don’t you have your own people to be able to tell this?”

Ms. Ito smiled gently. Like if it was saying: mother sees through such things.

I smile bitterly. Well, putting aside organization I’m dealing with, Ms. Ito can’t be hated.

“I’ll examine it, but as long as it doesn’t require weapons or things like that, I look forward to that.”

“Thank you. I’ll be glad if you just check it.” – said Ms. Ito smiling and left the store.

I slurped my coffee and put the bookmark into my pocket.

I felt that everything is flowing toward a different direction than I vaguely planned before. Not good, it’s a bad flow.

Gini’s preaching

After I completely finished the coffee I went to the station’s toilet. Feeling refreshed after relieving myself, I thought about how Djibril was doing. I start to worry what she’s doing. When I worry like that, strangely I feel a bit relieved from all troubles, which made me smile.

Role of a father is quite enjoyable. That’s why I thought I have to live, even as the children-user, the worst pseudonym for a

mercenary. I walk thinking and once again I leave the station.

There's Gini at the entrance. I waved to her.

"Gini, how is it?"

She rushed up to me. She doesn't have a headgear. Between her red hair, there are reddish brown eyes and freckles. She stares at me.

"What happened?"

She still stares intensely at me. She turns her face away.

"Please don't pick on Djibril."

I felt lost. Honestly lost.

"I didn't mean to."

"Adults"

"Do I look like an adult?"

"? You look very adult." – Gini replied immediately. I nodded.

"That's a relief. Talking with older people, I was losing confidence. I'll go to Djibril and apologize. Where's she?"

Putting on her headgear, Gini started talking. I see, she tried to stand out at the station – I reflected.

"We are securing her with several girls."

"Thanks. I mean sorry."

"Honestly. During the marriage you know who should be the second wife."

"Who?"

"Me."

"And who's going to marry?"

"You, Arata."

I look into the distance. Right, those guys are from a culture,

which accepts bigamy. I thought that men in this culture must be amazing. Just one would be beyond my powers, but with a few of them that would be hopeless.

“By the way, I ask just out of curiosity. Why not the first wife?”

“I don’t want to fight with Djibril.”

“I see.”

They want to marry the father, ah they’re all still kids. – smiling, I walked.

Djibril was standing still under the huge whale, we saw this morning.

Seems like it was the only place she could go from the station without getting lost.

Don’t run – I thought, standing near Djibril. Before I noticed, Gini was gone. That girl is clever, quickly reacting to situation. Or does she just avoid the danger? Either way it’s a good ability.

“Sorry.”

“I’m the one should apologize. I couldn’t keep up guarding.”

“That’s okay.”

“It’s not okay... it’s not.”

I saw that Djibril was crying. I felt like I was hit by a hammer.

“You’re in more danger than me.”

“If Arata dies, everyone dies.”

“...My bad. Don’t cry.”

From above her headgear I stroke her head. I thought that I want to quit fighting wars.

“Um... well, let’s just go for a lunch.”

I’m pitiful. In that situation I couldn’t say anything else.

“Next time I will make sure to be properly protected.” – I said.

Djibril nodded slightly. I felt a sign that she was hesitating whether to grasp my sleeve or not, so I reached out my hand. Djibril grasped it. Somehow I felt like it was wrong, but if it were the case that it wasn't the sleeve I could have got into trouble, so I kept silent. Honestly, adolescence is tough. Because of all of this I completely missed the chance to talk about work.

I was heading toward a store with cheap seafood, but in fact I wanted to have a bite of tsukemen. I've noticed that I could live with people who're not eating pork, although pork is deeply rooted in Japanese people eating habits. That also contains manju with meat filling, ramen, pork, it's all popular Japanese food, but unexpectedly I couldn't recommend them any of it.

△1. That's more or less the word used, but the meaning is more along the lines of: is this food compliant with their religion.

△2. Short for National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo.

△3. A word similar to bar hopping but with shop instead so maybe something like shop hopping? Anyway visiting many similar shops in rapid succession is what the author was going for – is what I think.

△4. Children user or “kodomo-tsukai” with use in a similar meaning like using a tool – can be taken as an insult that he makes children fight while he stays back.

△5. Literally “They” but pointing at women and as far as I recall there are no such words in English.

△6. Standard formal wear worn by students usually when going to interviews is what it means.

7. Kodomo-omoi or children-lover here does not mean pedophile but rather points to like, similar to dog lover or cat lover. Simply someone who likes and takes care of children I guess.

Chapter 3

Angel and the evening dinner

Dinner

Our second stay was at the hotel in Shinjuku. I decided to stay here as it's close to the station with mainly foreigners as guests and also a cheap fee.

There's no large room, but instead it's divided into twin and single rooms, so I deemed it as acceptable.

For evening dinner we went on a short walk to a Turkish restaurant nearby the JR Shinjuku South Exit. It's called Uskudar. Nobody knew what it meant, but Djibril talked with the owner and it looked like she immediately got it.

“It's Üsküdar. East side of Istanbul.”

After listening to the explanation I thought that's probably a name of a place.

When I was making a telephone reservation, the restaurant didn't have any more bookings, so I had it all for myself.

Except me, they are all Muslims, but since Turkey is also a country with lot of Muslims, there's no problem with ingredients used in Turkish cuisine for them. I don't have to worry about this place.

Going around everyone's tables I was watching as they are eating. In the new hotel I didn't have the chance to meet with everybody, except for the time during the meals.

“How's Tokyo?” – I asked.

“It's that big, I feel dizzy.” – answered Hakim and after thinking further he added:

“It’s like a city, where stars from the night sky has fallen.”

Hearing that I thought it’s a beautiful expression. They are born poets.

“Well, even if it’s beautiful, it doesn’t mean that good people are living here, so you have to be cautious.” – I warn them. After I did, I thought that I should have praised the expression.

Boys and girls nodded and then each of them started to dispute that this city doesn’t have training drills and defense after all.

This city is peaceful, at least that part of it is also thanks to the efforts of those women. – I thought.

National organization, which name I don’t even know. She was saying “our” organization, so shall I call it Ms. Ito and family^[1]? – I thought. Or maybe it’s indiscreet or inappropriate?

Anyway this restaurant’s bread Pita is delicious. It’s a thin bread, which is not getting big with the yeast. Between it, they are inserted things like kebab, chickpeas, yogurt and spinach paste. I eat it and while enjoying its great taste I saw that at one table, kids were showing to each other souvenirs they bought today.

Most of them had rollers at the bottom of their sneakers. They’ve bought the roller shoes. From what I’ve heard they were cheap. It’s been already a long time, since they were last popular, so it was probably disposal from the stockpiles – I thought. Surprisingly it seemed even Djibril bought one.

Showing each other shoes at a meal’s place feel a bit like a manner violation, but since we’re the only ones here I thought I will forgive it.

“By the way, I saw an elf.” – said Omar out of the blue.

I got a piece of pita bread in my throat. I look at Omar. He

looks intrigued. I moved away from his gaze and looked at Djibril. Omar did the same and I was caught. Seeing the grimace on his face I thought that it serves me right.

“No way, Sophie?”

It's nothing like “no way”, but I said it for convenience.

“Ah, that's for sure. There's no one else with such queer ears.”

“That evil djinn?” – murmured Djibril.

“She was in Akihabara?”

“No, in Shinjuku.”

Suddenly I wanted to stand up and run away. Me and she are friends, but even friendship has it's limits, and that was it. Mainly her personality is something which rasps my nerves.

“It seems she didn't notice me. She had a mourning dress. She probably was on someone's funeral.” – said Omar.

I couldn't say that it was probably mine and that it's written on Akiba Blog. There are also things in this world, that you don't want to believe.

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing.” – I said with confidence, but reconsidering that it may be a wrong thing to say as a friend I decided to add a few words.

“Actually the organization which is following us made a contact with me. They've asked us for a job. If it's authentic, it's not Sophie's place, I would feel sorry for her if she gets involved.”

Perfect play of friendship – I thought.

“If it's an authentic one. First of all, are they really a government organization?” – said Omar, with face which is saying: We're not in a movie, right? Djibril gives me a serious

look. I hold myself back from answering. I stuffed my mouth with pita bread and then I crossed my arms.

“First time I saw them at the airport and since then they were intermittently contacting me. Even at the police station. Fact that they were waiting there, makes me think that they’re connected to the government.”

I said that it would be different if they were waiting outside the station, but coming up to the police station must mean that they’re a member of a public institution.

“Probability that it’s a government organization is 99% I guess.”

“Hmm. What kind of work? – said Omar, sipping his free Turkish coffee.

Muddy water is the perfect name for it. At the bottom there is black powder which looks like sand. So that makes it strong and tasty. That is – only if you don’t drink to the bottom.

“I haven’t seen it yet. I guess later we will check it together and inform everyone.”

“Are you going to accept it?” – interjected Djibril who’s been silent up until now.

I also drank coffee. I recall one scene from a movie with an exchange of insults on coffee – American vs muddy water. From the perspective of muddy water, American is indeed too weak.

“That depends on terms and contents.” – I said with a common sense expression, also thanks to the power of coffee.

I kept working at the private military company as a mercenary selling my life piece by piece, but now it’s about the children’s life. Most of all I want to take care of them.

On the other hand, there is also counting the chickens before

they are hatched – if I make this operation a success and make connections with a government institution we could get a job from time to time. I thought that the best thing will be to make a condition to get permission to stay for those kids. But I guess it's too optimistic.

“I don't know if there's a sense to hire us.”

Omar was still in half-doubt. I obediently nodded.

I thought that the other party probably doesn't know about Sophie. In the worst case, she could be a trump card... probably. Let's leave it at that.

Together with coffee, this restaurant offered a thing called rice pudding. It was surprising considering the name, but I see that everyone normally eats it. I also tried it and it's not bad. I would say that even tasty. I recall the breakfast with added spoons. I thought that they don't feel strange about eating rice for dessert.

SD contents

We leave the restaurant and walk toward the station, having Kōshū Kaidō on the left hand. I felt it strange that even in the evening the line of cars is long. But it was normal before. It seems I came from very far away.

After arriving at the hotel, I put the coat on the hanger. My new suit was not only washable, but also had shape-memory so it didn't require ironing. Yes, it's exactly what I wanted. I also bought 5 neckties. Unfortunately as for shoes I got sneakers, but walking with leather boots through the wilderness is tough.

Looking at today's spoils of war I picked up the micro SD card from the coat.

I insert the SD card into a cellphone and take a quick look at the contents. One image seemed like a snapshot. Photography

of some family.

I think that the data was encrypted or something. No, they probably wouldn't do this for amateurs like us – I reconsidered. I look at the folder and search if there's any more data. There's nothing. Suspiciously I gaze at the list of pictures. After this one photograph with family, there was a text shot by a camera. Guessing it must be it, I open the file, but there are just some trivial information and a map. I got discouraged. No, that must be the objective – I thought.

These are countermeasures in case it was accidentally lost or picked by someone. But that won't work in case it was stolen.

I unfasten the necktie and fall down on the bed. I decided to patiently look at the image file. Approximately ten minutes later I finally got the aim of the image:

Request: Personal escort

Reward: 7000000 yen (gross)

Gross, that means total sum is seven millions. since it's the job from the government the amount is high – I thought, but that wasn't the case. Considering that the day and time of the assault is unknown it becomes a confusing job, so the pay doesn't feel so good anymore. Yet, it's not unprofitable. That gives a budget of a little above 3 millions for operating of 20 soldiers for a month. In that sense it's even quite profitable if delivery of weapons won't take too much money. However they understand it's not 10 or even 5 millions^[2].

I think that it depends on the enemy. I could take this job if the enemy is not much better than an amateur, but if it's a perfectly armed professional it's not a job I could take. That's what I concluded. In the past I took a job of a mercenary for six millions per year. Now I get seven for a short period of time, but I have twenty six lives on stake. I guess I could say it's a career progress.

I got up from the bed and head to Omar's room. When I came I saw that Omar was turning the bed upside down, removing and checking the base of an electrical outlet. The room seemed like after a raid. I stood dumbfounded.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking measures for wiretaps."

"Ah. I see."

Without doubt Omar and Djibril are more cautious than me. They're dependable as much as possible. I looked askance at the turned up bed and while standing told about the request for the job. Standing, Omar is listening to me. I think he could have sat down, but this is that honest friendship. He must be paying full attention to me. Or it can be that there's nowhere to sit.

"Guarding is a police job. Why is an intelligence agency making us do it?" – said Omar.

"Probably it's something police can't handle, I guess." – I answer. Omar seemed dissatisfied with it. He was frankly suspicious.

"Our poor equipment and headcount is better than the police?"

"Or maybe police can't be trusted" – I stated the possibility.

"Does it mean there's also a possibility that police can turn into our enemy?"

Omar frowned even more. Somehow I was just looking at the ceiling and said as I have been counting:

"First, let's take the possibilities. Is it too much for police or is it that police isn't trustworthy. That's about it." – I spoke.

Illumination in the hotel is dim. Lighting in interiors in Japan is too bright comparing to foreign standards. I first noticed

that, when I left Japan. They don't make day at night. Just set the lights to be able to see. It's like they don't deny night itself.

"We just don't want any issues with the police, right? What do you think is more probable?"

"The last one. They don't want to mobilize the police. In that case I understand it."

"Who is the object of escorting that mobilizing the police is a problem for him?" – Omar looked displeased after I said that.

"Arata. If you don't know – no one does."

I intended to say that I know everyone is saying that to me, but I said smiling:

"Even so, it seems I don't see well my own feet."

Omar says, smiling bitterly:

"We're just a miserable Sinbad who escaped a valley of diamonds, holding to your golden eagle's wings. Holding them, we just make efforts to watch what's beneath you."

"Not golden eagle. It was a roc, which Sinbad met as I recall. Well, without the wind, there's no bird that can fly. I entrust you my underneath."

"Are you planning to take this job?"

"To tell you the truth, at the present stage I'm about 50% ready to do this. So there is a fairly high chance that I will take it. Even if everyone is negative about it, the chance to make connections with the government is attractive."

Omar crossed his arms. They are big – I think. I also need to train.

Without concern he gave me his honest opinion:

"You're Japanese, so it will be okay if you don't take it."

"Right. I don't want my identification with Japan to affect it."

But well, I guess it doesn't. It's not like I hate Japan, but it's not as important as kids." – I said frankly. Omar smiled a bit and pat me on the back.

"...Making large profit, buying a citizenship of some country and living peacefully would be nice."

"I always dream about it. But if kids die, it's all for nothing. It's earning money with steady work and nervously cutting back the danger."

"It's a long and tiresome way."

"Step by step, we will get positive results. Thanks for advice."

It's like night illumination for a foreigners, there's no need to change everything. If it's dark it's okay, it's enough to change it slightly just to be able to see. Day will eventually come. I said about that to Omar.

I'm going to go sleep now. As expected, standing around talking for a long time make you want to sit or lie down, so I decided to leave the room. At the last minute Omar opens his mouth:

"Do you intend to talk with Djibril?"

"It's already late, so I'll do it tomorrow."

"Alright."

Omar made eyes like he was wondering about something and then looked at me and said:

"Arata, you can just let it go. You don't have to drag us. "

"Omar. I don't have any dreams. Seems like I'm not capable of dreaming. I have no idea what things I want to realize. If I think about it, I've always been paying to read stories about dreams of other people. Doing so, I was feeling like I had a dream."

I sneered at my old self. Being unable to admit that you don't

have dreams is also a tragedy. But now it's different. Just a bit.

“Even now I can't see my dream, but I think it's okay now. My dreams are kid's dreams. I don't know how it's different to the light novels and manga, but I'm satisfied with this. Surprisingly satisfied.”

Omar looked down.

“Sorry. Since you came to Japan, you always looked troubled.”

So it's that apparent – I thought, but from my mouth came out a lie.

“It's because of Sophie. In fact I knew about it.”

“You won't meet her?”

“Well, you see, everyone take it wrongly. It's not like that.” – I sighed, with a troubled face.

“It must be hard.”

It really is. I added in my mind and left the room.

Request for Hakim

When I return to my room, before it I saw Djibril, sitting while holding her knees.

“What are you doing?” – when I ask, Djibril looks up at my face. She had teary eyes.

“I called and called and there was no answer, so I thought I'm hated.”

“Hated? By who?”

“By you, Arata.”

“No way.”

“But today we had a fight.”

“We had?” – I said frankly, but Djibril scowled at me. Because

of that I felt I did something horribly wrong. However I'm not sure where I was wrong.

"Well, anyway, there's no way I could hate you, right?"

I said smiling, thinking how could I hate such a cute kid.

But Djibril's expression didn't get better. After hesitating for a moment, she said timidly:

"Because I'm a poor kid from a third world country?"

"Of course not. Now I'm mad." – I said. Now that hit where it hurts. I think that I controlled my voice and timing well for an attack I received.

I brushed her head gently, smiling. Adolescence is difficult.

"Even if you were Japanese it would be the same."

Although, because of her country conflicts, she was trained as a mercenary just like a hostage and because of that I was able to meet the angel Djibril. I can't think that meeting her in Japan would be very likely.

I ignored that thought.

"You don't have to worry about that. Go back to your room and sleep. Tomorrow will also be tough."

"You need a guard."

"I'll ask Hakim for that." – I said, what came to my mind at this moment.

"Hakim is still small."

"You didn't sleep much yesterday Djibril. I won't make Hakim do this alone. It's okay, go sleep. Do you want to make me worry?"

Djibril looked away.

"If that happens, what will you do?"

“I’ll get angry. But after I hear the reason.” – I said that, after recalling that I was told it’s bad to decide with prejudice.

“Reason... I don’t know well. Please get angry.”

Djibril said that, horribly tormenting herself. She catches her breath and is looking at me. I wiped the bottom of her eyes, with a handkerchief I’ve just bought.

“I won’t be angry if you make that face. It’s okay, go rest. Tomorrow will be a good day.” – I said and gently pat her head.

I chase away Djibril and call Hakim. He accepts his task with a stern pose.

“I shall watch the hallway, right!”

“No, inside the room, because other guests would be startled.”

“Roger!” – saying that, Hakim rolled up with a blanket on the sofa and went to sleep before me. Judging from his sleep-talk it seemed that he had a dream about the whale.

It’s like I predicted, so satisfied I also decided to sleep. Well, Ms. Ito and family are watching, so even if someone is going to attack me they will call me – I thought. If they think about employing me, I can at least expect such concern.

I lie down on the bed next to the innocently breathing Hakim and think. I wonder why I lied to Omar.

I’m indeed worried. About 24 kids and Omar. I have to think about a plan for the future of – including me – 26 people.

As a mercenary, when you don’t know what tomorrow brings, there is nothing from planning future. There is also a short-term job for seven million yens, temporary issue of setting up a private military company in Japan, children entering puberty, securing financially their lives. There is no end to problems.

Because I’m a poor kid from a third world country – I recall Djibril words. I drove away this thought deeper into the sphere

of my thoughts. Indeed I thought like that, that's a fact. That's also a part of my atonement for destroying the village. But that's not everything and this feeling is driving those thoughts away.

I have trouble with my resolve. Formerly when I was doing a job alone without being concerned about other people I could act without any worries. I was desperate. But now, I grew up and my sight has extended. I started to pay attention to others. It won't be like before.

I think about kids. I also thought about countries. You don't choose a country where you are born, but you can choose your motherland. It's okay even if it's a stepmother. I imagined that Japan could be their step motherland, but completely lost confidence, thinking whether Japan is good for kids with people like Ms. Ito. The problem is with differences in jurisdiction.

I think about what mother I would want. Rich, quiet and refined woman like Japan, or one with remodeled ears into an elf... a woman tolerating even pointed ears like America. Or maybe there is some other, better motherland?

I smiled bitterly, thinking that it seems like searching for a marriage partner. I feel like I want to talk with someone about my troubles.

Suddenly I recalled my former superior Lanson. I wonder what he is doing now. Maybe he's in his quiet office in Central Asia, holding a coffee in one hand and giving instruction to mercenaries.

Arms and supplies

Next morning.

Hakim was blushing apologizing eagerly, but I laughed and

forgave him. Good thing about Hakim is that he doesn't fake it. If it was Gini she would squint and tell a bunch of lies I couldn't have even imagined, like a merchant on a bazaar praising his articles.

Gini's lies are amusing so it's okay, but I think that honesty is also good. Concretely speaking, everyone is adorable.

When I say that Djibril will get mad, so let's keep it between us, Hakim completely flushed and nodded. I'm content. And so for now I decided to send everyone for a walk like the previous day.

This time also while testing cell phones. On the occasion, my purpose will be to make them grab a sense of movement with a map.

I quietly wait in the lobby. There was not much time needed, until a person with beautiful black hair appeared. This also went as expected.

"Have you decided?" – said Ms Ito, sitting next to me. I don't know what's so funny, but she's looking at me smiling. It didn't look like a courtesy smile at all, so I thought that women are scary.

"Yes. I'm going to decide after hearing some more information."

"So you're positive about it. That's good."

"That depends on conditions."

I told her to not raise false hopes. Actually I'm ready to give up anytime if conditions will be bad.

"Right. You were concerned about kids after all."

I didn't know how to answer. I agree it's that, but it feels like she takes advantage of me with it.

"What's the matter?"

“I felt like my weakness has been found.” – when I said it frankly, Ms. Ito took a long hard look at me and then amused, put her hand on her mouth and laughed. It was a kind laugh.

“Well, I wonder. I feel like it’s really a weakness, but my boss doesn’t seem to believe so. That private military matter is far from commonly accepted things after all.”

I had mixed feelings. Is that the way it is?

“I always think about if there is something I can do, something beside this job.”

“I feel uncomfortable requesting this from such person, but...”

“No, don’t be. When you don’t work you can’t eat. But, well, honestly speaking I didn’t think I will get an offer in Japan.”

“It’s not like it’s the first, or last outsourcing.” – said Ms. Ito.

“That might be right, but still. It looks like a spy movie.”

“It’s nothing that exaggerated. We don’t normally put wiretaps or something. We also don’t have a right to arrest.”

“So you have different jurisdiction. Then I have two things I want to ask about. First – I can operate in Japan, but what about weapons? And second: degree of risk. I don’t care if you can’t provide such information like degree of danger you estimate, but in that case it becomes hard for me to undertake it.”

Ms. Ito nodded and said with serious face:

“I can provide to some degree information concerning the degree of risk. However, that means your monitoring will be more tight.”

“In that case I will gladly take the information about the risk. I can’t be more pleased for more strict surveillance. I will think about it as if I have hired a guard.”

“You really haven’t been thinking about founding a business or illegal stay, have you?”

“Well I have, but that’s it. It depends on whether the kids will be happy. At this point I don’t think Japan is the best choice. Of course it’s still good for traveling purposes.”

“I’m glad that private military companies don’t spread in this country.”

“Yeah, but there’s one I’ve been to, an American one.”

“Oh, there’s also an English one. In any case it’s our ally.”

“Well, thank you for information.”

So that’s it. They just don’t like when some shady organizations establish private military companies – I thought.

“By the way, have you considered asking my former company? They don’t have anything more than a recruiting branch in Japan, but they have their own combat unit and Japanese staff as well.”

“I’ll give you free information. Currently Japan also deploys their own combat unit. Weapons are restricted by law, so there are only batons and bow guns, though.”

“I see. As expected from a big player.”

So there are people who were thinking similar to me. Although they have connections to actually do it. – I think. Military also needs political strength. And politics also needs military strength. Leaving aside pacifistic ideas which want to separate them, both coexist entangled in mutual love.

Pacifism in that case is like an illicit love. What’s worse, even for me standing in the middle of my fall in life as a former NEET, reality is that if you have at least some military strength, politics comes lured by its sweet scent.

Even for me reality is like that I’m drawn by the sweet scent of politics, so I have to be careful. Anyhow it’s a bad example for the kids.

“Let’s leave it. Shall I tell you more about the job?”

“Please do.”

Ms. Ito smiled, raised from the seat and led me by the hand. I blushed, on what Ms. Ito said that she has an eye on me here. It was like a start of a tryst of a man and a woman early in the morning in the hotel room. In that case, my room. I was extremely nervous.

I entered the room first. When I saw that sheet was disheveled I started to tidy it up in a hurry and then I saw sofa’s blanket. Hakim has been tidily folding it. I thought I have to properly praise him for that. He’s more admirable than me.

“Forgive me for the disorder.”

“No, I am the one who intrudes.”

I offered a chair and sat on the bed. Ms. Ito sat next to me on the bed. She was smiling and I was in total disorder. I stand up.

“So about the degree of risk.” – what she said was sensible. I rearrange my posture. Well, of course it’s about it.

“Do you know the enemy?”

“Yes. It’s a religious group.”

“Supposing I take this, who am I going to protect?”

“Leader of a sect. That religious group’s one.”

I think my eyes had to look surprised and it seems my face looked very funny, since Ms. Ito loudly laughed.

“Forgive me. It was cute. What you’ve just did Mr. Arata.”

“Ah no, it’s just that Japanese normally are not interested in religion. But, still... why do believers hunt down their leader?”

“It was our informant.”

I looked away. So it’s not about god – I thought. In short it leaked out to the followers that their guru was coaxed with

money or something for provision of information. And if the leader gets caught it will also influence Ms. Ito and family, so they want to help , well... just let the leader go away somewhere. Or maybe they want to eradicate the anti-guru group and make the current one continuously rule.

What's worse, it could be that the Ms. Ito and family provided them arms in the first place. What a scary world.

“Setting aside personal feelings, as professional, speaking purely about military affairs, in the first place I want to know how many are there and what equipment have those believers, who turned into a foe.”

“Yes, some of them have illegal arms. It's the group who first became hostile. In other words it's an armed group. Their size is around 40 people. For the equipment they are obtaining, there are weapons remodeled for smuggling and to a certain degree – grenades. It seems they don't have machine guns or other things like that.”

“Is there any organization which trained them? It's essential.”

“There's no instructor. However it's certain that they're learning from books and there is a small training facility in Gunma. They call it... a center for ascetic training.”

“Is there any data about that armed group, like year of founding?.”

“Year of founding is more than 20 years ago. As for records: few abductions, imprisonments and tortures. They also have been noted for their ability of hiding corpses.”

“I see. In my area there are just secular Muslims, so I think there's not any relationship with those people.”

“Yes, you came from abroad, so I'm relaxed. Besides the other side is related to Buddhism.”

I see. So you diligently selected us? – I thought.

“You can just say yes or no – is there any other factor which can influence the enemy’s military potential?”

“Not yet I think.” – Ms. Ito reply was prompt, like it was good news.

“It’s been two days since the armed group disappeared from the training facility in Gunma. There’s possibility that they obtained something else during that period.”

“So if we go with fitting equipment there’s possibility it will be a belated effort.”

I said that I don’t indent to hurry. Otherwise there will be extra costs.

Ms. Ito adorably bend her head slightly and smiled.

“Headquarters of the religious group itself is protected. Besides the armed group dispersed in order to escape our eyes. It takes them some time to be able to attack together. I believe they don’t have military potential to attack with small numbers.”

“I see. Okay.”

The bed has greatly sank under the weight of two people. I thought it isn’t fit for sitting. I asked, thinking that if Ms. Ito wasn’t using it I should have sat on chair:

“What about the matter of weapons?”

“For direct things, you have to arrange it yourself.”

“Indirect weapons^[3] depends on negotiations and let’s see... as for direct I don’t have connections for that.”

“I present you the data. You can take them from there.”

“I hope they stand for average international prices.”

“It presents criminal organizations from Asia. I think it would be better if you restrain from smuggled weapons.”

“It seems that you need a weapon to get one.”

“That’s right.”

Ms. Ito grinned. It felt like she was saying: some way or another you have to do something about that weapons.

“Ok then.”

“You can give me your answer today in the afternoon. I’ll call you.” – said Ms. Ito, making a shape of the phone with fingers.

“Thank you very much. I think reward is in cash, but taking it out of Japan would be troublesome.”

“I will take care of that. You want it in dollars, right?”

“Absolutely, what about the price negotiations?”

“Maximum I can offer is 500000.” – she said smiling. I see. They can draw up to half a million. – I think. Well, I’ll believe that they won’t shirk the payment as it often happens in the business world. I made a smile.

“Okay. I’ll accept it for 7500000. If this decision will benefit Japan, let it be then.”

It was a big lie. Well, such lip service won’t do any harm.

“At least that I can guarantee.” – said Ms. Ito with a serious look. It seems at least that was the truth.

I nodded.

“Not only Japan. I believe it’s also for the sake of my family.”

“So Mr. children-lover was also worried about parents?”

“Because it’s my weakness, please don’t tell anyone.” – I said. This was the truth. It’s better to moderately blend lies and truth. I’ve learned that while talking to Ms. Ito and family.

Commencing action

I gave the kids, who returned to the hotel a smile and listened to their impressions of today's walk. Everyone is amused, looking at each other.

Gini came out to the front after she glided and swiveled around through the hallway.

"I've become pretty good at this."

It seems she was practicing how to handle the roller shoes. Bitterly smiling I said "yeah, sure" and then sent them directly the data via the infrared data communication, which only mobile cell phones in present Japan have. That mysterious function is enough to believe that all Japanese are spies.

"Have you decided to accept it?" – said quietly Omar, dressing in the room. Djibril and Ivan are also there.

I nodded and then looked at Djibril and Ivan. They listen to our conversation in silence. I gently brushed the heads of those two.

"I can find many excuses, but what do you want to hear: official story, true story or something between?"

"Everything except the official one." – said Omar, neatly folding clothes.

I made a face, which was saying: I wanted you to actually listen to that official story and then opened my mouth:

"The sad truth is that, we are being watched more strictly than I thought, so establishing a business in Japan and illegal stay here seems to be a great problem. Because of that, as a plan B I thought to get money."

"So that's how things are."

"Yeah, so between true and official story I thought that instead of founding a company in Japan hiding, maybe it's better to make achievements and aim in the future for a legal

business.”

“Is there such possibility?”

“It looks like it. Seems like they’ve made a number of violent subcontractors. Like religious organizations. Well, rather than using fanatics and antisocial religious groups, we are more reasonable and a clean choice.”

“That’s like a game between two worst teams.” – said Omar, smiling bitterly and holding a bag. Seems like he has finished the preparations. I also smiled bitterly.

“I won’t deny that more than returning empty handed, for one thing I feel we can get better outcome than before. What do you think?”

“OK. By the way, I ask just out of curiosity. What’s the official story?”

“If we would be lucky enough to get money for travel cost + [α\[4\]](#), I thought we could go next time on a trip to America.”

Omar said nothing, but his face eloquently was telling that’s the first-class answer and the best joke he has heard this year. Ivan spontaneously laughed. Djibril looked gloomy.

I looked at Djibril. Djibril is looking at me too. Her eyes are shaking.

“Is something troubling you?”

“That women with long hair is dodgy.”

“We would be a bad client if we had trusted them.” – I replied honestly. Ivan laughed again, but after he saw that Djibril and I are looking at him, he concealed his mouth with both hands. Omar was looking up at the ceiling.

I don’t understand why everybody’s acting like that.

“Well, that’s why I plan to get along without trusting them.”

Djibril seemed dissatisfied. Must be tough, adolescence.

When I looked toward Omar, I saw he sighed and opened his mouth. Looks like he decided to provide some covering fire.

“What about putting Djibril on the negotiating table as an escort?”

“No.”

Djibril holds her breath and makes a hurt face on my prompt rejection.

Brushing gently Djibril’s head that her headgear concealed her eyes, I said somewhat loudly:

“It’s bad for education. There’s no way I can let a kid see how adults do stupid things.”

“In that case, am I good then?”

“Of course.” – I said, doubting if that really is covering fire.

From some reason Omar laughed. I look at Djibril. She has eyes, like her mood got better. Though I see only her eyes, so I don’t know.

“If Omar is going to be an escort, I don’t have any problem with that.”

“So it’s settled.” – said Omar.

I nodded, though I didn’t know well how it was settled.

What kind of magic he used? I’m going to ask him that later.

Acquisition of weapons

I sent kids led by Omar to the Toshimaen amusement park. Speaking of which I heard that it went bankrupt, but I don’t know how’s the real situation. Now I’m going to obtain the weapons myself.

I informed everyone about that and walked off alone from the lobby.

“I’m going too.”

Djibril chased after me immediately. Well, that’s not a surprise. I patted her head.

“I want you to have fun at the amusement park. The work starts tomorrow.”

“Saying that you mean you’re going to meet with that person, right?”

“I’m going to obtain the weapons. For now at least.”

“So it’s not about adults doing stupid things. Then there’s no problem going with you.”

“Yes, but still...”

I looked at Djibril. She fixed her headgear.

“I think the amusement park will be fun.”

“It will end in a quarrel, so I’m not going to say anything more.”

I scratched my head.

“Okay, I’ll take you. But you know, I think you don’t have to grow up so fast.”

I can’t read Djibril’s expression, as I can only see her eyes, but she turned them away.

“I’m already grown up. It’s just that Arata doesn’t accept it.”

“Kids always say that.”

“Last year Arata said the same.”

I left the hotel in silence. Djibril trotted and matched pace with me. She looks up at me. I said that I’m not angry. She nodded and looked a bit happy.

We enter the train from JR Shinjuku West Entrance. To Yamanote line.

While standing in a shaking train, the old woman sitting in front of my eyes, handed over to me a paper bag.

“Are you going shopping?”

“Yes.”

The old woman laughs. I got off at the Ikebukuro.

“What have you received?”

“Probably a book. And also – if they were nice – information.”

I closed one eye and looked at the contents of the bag. I saw the spine of a book with the title “Facing the growing up child” on it. This is it.

“What book?”

Djibril stretched out and peeked into the bag, but she can’t read Japanese, so she asked me about it. I smiled.”

“Educational book about how to deal with children.”

“Please throw it away right now.”

“All kids say that.” – I said it, walking.

Djibril walks next to me and looks up. I get a strange feeling when I think that only I know that girl’s face, so I walked with long steps, but after that I slowed down a little so she could equally walk with me.

“What are you going to buy?”

“Lots of small porcelain bottles and fireworks. And a crossbow.”

“I know crossbows. Grandfathers used it for killing stray dogs.”

“Really? Not a gun?”

“He said that guns are loud.”

“Well, they are.”

Although it's a bow gun, it's a word which is used only in Japan. That's a wasei-eigo. In English it's called a crossbow. It's like a weapon made of laid on the side strung bow with a place for a base and a trigger. Comparing to a gun, it's very unfitting for a weapon, but thankfully even in full of limits Japanese stores you can normally buy it. Although according to law you can't buy it if you're not at least eighteen years old.

I went to the archery and crossbow store. It was very small, but not a hidden shop at the first floor in the building. I told Djibril about law regulations and make her wait, then entered the store.

Despite that it was an ordinary day in the morning, there was a person with a suit, which was conspicuous. Well, I'm the same. I asked if I can make a large order of crossbows. The shop owner answered at once that it can take time depending on things and asked if they are for a sport use. Of course – I replied and told him that I need around two dozens.

I don't say I'm in hurry. I pick a model, but I can't make a proper choice, because although it's a provisional weapon I entrust lives with it. That being said, I also haven't used guns enough. I couldn't judge which will be good.

I decide to consult with Djibril and simply ask about the usual time of delivery, then leave the store. I just bought a lot of targets and left the shop, saying that I'll come again.

“You're fast.”

“Those crossbows seem to have low performance, so since they are cheap time of delivery is short or it's just the entry models must probably have been selling well. There's not

much ones, which are at a level to be good for military use. In the worst case we will have to get them from different places. Can you tell me what kind of crossbow will be good?”

“Yes.”

I walked to the store with military goods and self-protection tools. There are also crossbows lying here. I purchased one. I take some time to adjust it and shoot at the store’s joint firing range. There is also several types of bolts. It’s made from aluminum, so it’s light and has enough strength. Size is equal to the assault rifle.

Unlike the ones for sport use, there were also crossbows with rapid-fire specification. Like revolver it has nocked bolts on the axis which fires next projectile after rotating. The bolt was drawn using gas. I thought that gas cylinder will be an obstruction, but it just looks like it.

I also bought 10 tactical vests. I’ll make them send it to the hotel, where we’re staying today.

Every store has small stock. I have to go to different places, but gathering crossbows for everybody will be hard – I thought. I was thinking about online delivery, but I don’t have currently any address. It would be suspicious to send it to the hotel, so I gave up that idea. I could have used a house of an acquaintance, but I don’t want to do this.

I can’t give a crossbow to Djibril in front of people. I decided to go into a love hotel, called City Hotel. Luckily Djibril didn’t seem to know anything. If she did I couldn’t of course enter such place.

“Strange hotel.” – said Djibril suddenly, when we entered the room. I nodded and just pulled out the crossbow. It even has a scope. Although only with triple zoom. I think it’s not a significant range.

“Give me your opinion.”

“Okay.”

I checked the material of the tactical vests. Seemed similar to the real one, or I should say that it was real. Okay, it's fine.

Djibril makes serious look.

“Trigger pull is heavy. Lighter would be better.”

“Does it look like it can be regulated?”

“Probably.”

I pile up the targets at the edge of the room, put cardboard boards behind them and make the targets.

In instruction it's said that range is 200m with 45 angle. Taking 45 angle would make aiming uncertain, so it's probably not very lethal. I thought about how to make use of that weapon.

Djibril stood up and pulled the string with legs. I say there's no need to use force while there is a gear wheel.

She draws up her knees and peeks through the scope. She took a test shot. It hit the mark, penetrating the cardboard and struck the wall behind, making unpleasant sound. I panic. Fortunately there was no hole in the wall. Seems like from 30m it surely could hurt someone.

“It's single-shot, so verification of the accuracy might be difficult.”

Djibril gave me her impressions. I nodded and sat on the chair. I didn't have the courage to sit on the bed.

“The influence of the wind is also big, so you don't have to worry about accuracy too much. However, it's not very functional. It's too much for fighting against guns. Opponents with rifles will outrange it and with submachine guns will outfire it.”

“It's better than nothing.”

Djibril's opinion was reasonable. I sigh.

"I'll try to gather them for everybody. The same one will be good?"

"I think there's no need to especially get the same one. Generally the same force of bowstring will fire at the same range."

"I got it. Anything else?"

"I think it would be better to remodel the bolts. If it just pierces like that, it won't kill."

"All right."

Djibril removed her headgear. I feel her hair has grown after all. She's standing and looking at me in some way embarrassed.

I ignored it.

"Well, so I know it can't be used as a weapon. Thanks. Let's get the small porcelain bottles next. Then to the hardware store. And then to the gas station. We'll also get the crossbows. We'll have a busy day."

"Arata."

I looked at Djibril who called me by my name once again. She looks anxious. Poor girl. I brought her to the far foreign country and took her to the love hotel for testing fire. I'm going to treat her kindly. As much as I can.

"What is it?"

"You said it so fast."

"Oh... my bad. It seems I'm excitable."

"Do you want to do this job so much?"

"No, not at all. I'm just happy that we'll be able to earn money for our living expenses."

I thought about the headgear. When it's just two of us, I

become strangely nervous when she removes it.

Djibril is looking at her feet.

“Are you doing this for that person?”

“That person?”

“One with the same hair color as me.”

“Most Japanese have the same color. Um, you mean Ms. Ito? No, not at all.”

“In that case it’s okay.” – said Djibril, toying with her hair. I looked away.

“Don’t become like Ms. Ito.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t want you to serve in an intelligence agency or army when you grow up.” – when I said that, Djibril fixed her eyes on me. What beautiful eyes – I thought.

“I go where Arata goes. Wherever it is.”

“In that case I want to immediately go somewhere out from this business. Unfortunately I’m not good at anything, except my military abilities. I don’t know any other method to feed you... No, I don’t have confidence even in my military abilities.”

For some reason Djibril smiled. I look sideways at her face and then wondered why she smiles.

“It’s been awhile since I’ve last heard Arata making complaints.”

“Oh, is that so... damn. I didn’t want you all to hear such things.”

“I think you don’t have to hide it.”

“I don’t want to make you worry.”

“I’m more anxious when I don’t hear Arata’s complaints.”

“... Okay, then I’m going to tell you if I’ll have one.”

At that moment Djibril smiling face was... damn it, It seemed like I’ve definitely must have said something wrong. I understood that that’s how a shining smile looks like.

Confluence

Then my condition got a bit worse. I can’t get myself together. At the other side, Djibril seemed better and like her usual self, she was pulling me with restrain while doing shopping. She was making sounds that were something between humming and whistling.

Our shopping didn’t end at Ikebukuro, we walked to Otsuka Station and even further to Nakano. I was pissed off that crossbows were expensive, on the same price level as assault rifles. Although I didn’t want to skimp on the equipment, comforting myself that it’s my love toward the children. Somehow it ended that I spent around 800000 yen. Ah, it’s no good.

Sending lot of packages to the hotel, we decided to go back with just a can of gasoline. Our destination is the hotel, or I should rather say ryokan. The place is in Bunkyo ward. Close to the Todai or more accurately – to the Todai’s Akamon. Student’s preparing for entrance exams to Todai probably stay in that old inn with a long history.

“You must be hungry.” – I said.

For lunch we went to the an eel restaurant, but I can’t say there’s much of them. Although I said eel restaurant, we ate at the conger one. Japanese were fishing and eating eels and most of them are extinct, so eel restaurants became conger restaurants. There are still few genuine eels, but they’re treated as a legendary fish.

“By the way, the amusement park is next to the Tokyo Dome.” – I was saying, looking at the outside from the subway’s window. It’s an underground train, but it goes through the area outside, so that’s why outside scenery can be seen from it. The views haven’t changed much since I left Japan before.

“What do you see?”

“Well, nothing.”

Djibril looks outside the window. Looking at her small hands, which were touching the glass I was full of regrets. Especially today, that I took her around.

“I wanted Djibril to go to the amusement park.”

“You still dwell on it.”

“If you are not an adult you can’t understand it. The true worth of an amusement park.” – I said, taking a look back at my own life. I disliked amusement parks when I was a kid, but later I had precious memories. I looked at Djibril. Her eyes were saying that she forgives my foolish reflection. Even with her headgear I knew it. That’s for sure the face with great compassion.

“That amusement park is running till night.” – said a voice in English from behind.

I wonder if Ms. Ito and family also have a rule to talk to me in trains.

“How was the shopping?”

Ms. Ito looked like an OL going back from work. With thin makeup, her face doesn’t look tired. That was the only difference from a real office lady. My eyes are focused on her tight skirt. Djibril pulled my sleeve.

“What is it?”

“It’s dangerous. Please step away.”

“I don’t have a weapon.” – said Ms. Ito, laughing.

“All adults say that.” – said Djibril, standing in the way of Ms. Ito.

I laughed, because I noticed that Djibril imitated my expression.

She scowled at me with protesting eyes. I patted her head.

“Don’t start any troublesome talks. We’re in front of a child.”

“Oh, you are trying to be a playboy.”

“I don’t understand.” – I said, switching to Japanese. It’s bad for Djibril’s education and there are a lot of people, whose character changes when speaking English. I supposed that Ms. Ito is one of them.

She smiles. It looks malicious.

“I asked if she is also going to do a job?”

She kept talking in English. Djibril grabs my sleeve and stays on alert.

“I put documents in the book. See you later.”

She left suddenly and got off the same way like the time she came. She skillfully blended with the crowd and immediately disappeared from my eyes. I looked at Djibril. She nervously or perhaps reluctantly let go off me.

“But I’ve already seen those documents.”

“It wasn’t the textbook?”

“Those are for job.”

“You should say it from the beginning.” – Djibril was troubled a bit and then firmly grabbed my sleeve. It seemed like my sleeves were going to be creased on the next day of shopping. I put my hope in the shape memory function and got off on the next station. Djibril hasn’t released my hand till we came before

the inn.

We arrive to the ryokan. It was a very complicated structure with lot of extensions build over extensions.

If I was a kid I would be very excited. I'm surprised that such building was in Tokyo. We are guided to a large room.

Omar and kids are lying exhausted on top of one another. They couldn't have run around on the combat field in that state.

"Uh, what's going on?"

"It was... shock." – said Gini, leaning against another girl, completely exhausted. She doesn't even have her headgear put on.

"What was it?"

I'm the one shocked here.

"Arata kept telling me that I also should go to the amusement park." – said Djibril. All children lift their heads simultaneously. Their eyes were saying it's a cruel treatment.

I was astonished. I don't get it.

"What happened?"

"It jumped, sprang up, swunged." – said Ivan and Hakim with a distant look.

"I guess that amusement park is such a place."

No one listens to my words.

"It may be our new training, but I think something a bit different is appropriate." – said Omar, holding his face with one hand exhausted.

"In America you also had amusement parks, right?"

"It was an uncomfortable place for a black guy. That's why I haven't ever been to it. But well, it was good." – Omar wearily

and scornfully laughed.

“It’s a ninja training. Do that everyday and we’ll certainly be able to use a few magic tricks.”

What kind of institution Toshimaen has become? – I thought dumbfounded.

Anyway, they looked very tired. Because the free pass ticket would be wasteful it seems they kept riding different machines without a rest. It makes sense.

Djibril looks at me with accusatory eyes – did you plan to take me to such a place?

I felt injustice.

“Well, anyhow. I know you are tired, but we have to prepare for work.”

“As long as we don’t have to go around without purpose and enter machines I’m okay.” – many children agreed with Omar. Next time I will have to teach them how to have fun properly. Leaving that aside I open my mouth to speak:

“Weapons have been supplied. I mean the crossbows. There are 30 bolts per person. We also have tactical vests.”

Omar looked at me.

“What about illuminators?”

“Yeah, we don’t have them.”

“Without them our military potential drops by fifty percent.”

“Well, the other party also doesn’t use an integrated information displays. – I said, comforting Omar. Fact that before talking about guns, the illuminator came up first shows how present wars look like.

“So, the crossbows as a weapon are not adequate. That’s why we’re going to make few little things.”

“What should we make?”

“I bought all the needed materials for grenades. We’re going to use them and make grenades from detonators and fuses.” – I said and Gini with Djibril nodded.

“When we couldn’t obtain something we were making it, so it’s okay.”

“We made them in the village, together with women. I also had an occasion to help them.”

“Oh, yeah. I was expecting that so that’s why I brought materials. Also we have to revamp the arrows to be able fight against someone. Regulating the trigger is an individual matter. We’re going to carry out a test firing and simulation of hypothetical battlefield at the same time. I will be the leader of tactical unit S. But that’s all after dinner and bath.”

At dinner there was an ocean of food, but sukiyaki also came out in small pots. It seemed that more or less everyone got used to rice, as they are eating with it. I felt a bit of satisfaction. Usually I don’t give it a thought, but I feel honest surprise when I realize that there are places when rice is not used.

Gini is trying to use chopsticks. I smiled.

We were taking turns in the bath and after we finished, leaders gathered in my place. In the corner of the big room. In the middle children are beginning the handicraft tournament.

Now we have to conduct a briefing before the battle.

“The objective are weapons, and if possible taking back the money from the transaction. Required condition is to not let them gather information.”

The war meeting starts from defining an objective. Killing each other is not a war. Achieving the objective through violence is. In our case it’s to say silently to the crime syndicate: please give the money and weapons. It’s already in itself a bad

enough education.

“I authorize engaging in battle in order to fulfill the objective and required condition.”

Gini raised her hand. I nodded and she started to work on the scope of the combat zone.

It's literally a matter of life and death how much authorization they get on the real battlefield. Where and how far to fight – the difference between criminal syndicate and a private military company (overlooking the matter whether it's illegal or legal) is the existence of regulated violence.

“Does it mean we can kill on sight?” – simply said Gini.

“It means to not take prisoner's. If you do then you will have to fight when rescue comes. Now we have the specific items – bolts, so I want you to bear in mind that enemy can take information from them. We don't want to be pursued because of it, so try to pick them up whenever you can.

“Enemy can probably analyze it from wounds on the corpse.” – Djibril said calmly.

“In that case you gather the bodies and blow them up.”

“Understood.”

Djibril lowered her head.

No matter how many time I'll do it I won't get used to it. It's not a pleasant briefing – I thought and said:

“Well, I hope that such scenario won't happen. Expecting things from the enemy is not appropriate though.”

“I've just sent you via infrared the image of a map. This is how the location looks like. It's for you to confirm visuals of the actual place on your cell phones.”

Year by year the map function on cell phones is getting better. Since around the time it became possible to display

three dimensions, this function has been actively used in wars.

“The problem is transportation.” – said Ivan with a sidelong glance at the crossbow. It’s big for a kid.

“I want a *donkey*.” – said Omar, indicating the robot for transportation of military equipment, otherwise – donkey.

Indeed the baggage we take to the battlefield is large. However I don’t think that they’re selling donkeys in Japan. Though if you searched then probably it’s possible to buy it.

“Well, instead of a donkey we’ll use a car. It won’t be an armed truck though.” – I said realistically. Omar nodded and continued:

“Cars are also convenient to transport infantry. I don’t want to ride up to the battlefield on a bus.”

“I feel the same way. We will probably have to ride separately. You can drive, the problem is if we have another driver.”

“Almost half of the kids can drive. Although they don’t have a license.” – said Omar. I nodded.

“I would be surprised if they had Japanese license. It will be annoying if we get caught because of traffic violation, so I’ll ask if they can also provide a driver. In the worst case, we’ll go on foot.”

Ivan frowns.

“Can’t we prepare an ambush?”

Gini and Djibril agree with him. Even I can see that. With a smile on my face I said to them to trust me.

“From the present military potential, storming is impossible. Let’s secure a well hidden spot.”

Storming in English is *assault* and means assault. I don’t know equivalent in Japanese for difference between assault and storming, but it would be easier to understand if storming will

be read as assault.

You can't make a successful assault if you don't have a military potential for it. Making an assault with small force is a suicide. Inevitability with the small forces is to chose an ambush instead of storming.

Omar showed by his eyes that he trust me and then spoke:

“What's the time of carrying out the plan?”

“After 50 hours.”

Everyone looked at their wristwatches. Usually those involved in military use analog watches for better measurement of time.

Djibril nodded.

“From tomorrow morning I will dispatch part of the unit. Until then, please give me directions.”

“Yeah. But go without arms. If you make eye contact with enemy, run.”

“Understood.”

“Focus deployment on the roof. Enemy has only a few escape routes, but still we'll put troops there. It will be bad if they escape with the weapons.” – I said.

Everyone nodded.

Starting

I get into a futon and look at the book. Getting along with adolescent daughter is important, but it wasn't my purpose now. I read the documents, which Ms. Ito brought.

The target group was legal, paying taxes religious Buddhist organization. I don't know much about Buddhism, but according to data that was a radical party, which separated from Zen.

From Islamist radicals to Buddhist radicals, huh? It seems that there are radicals in each religion.

It's probably like a double hit for commonly pious and quiet Buddhist monks or believers, both troubling and tragic. At worst people will be biased toward them. Recollecting my grandmother paying respects at butsudan, I felt full sympathy for them. I turn over the page, hoping that people won't have any bias toward them. It says about the history of the religious organization.

Originally the predecessors of that religious group were part of Zen, training their own martial arts from the times of their mother organization. This is like Shaolin. From that sentence I've learned that the famous Shaolin from Chinese movies is Zen. I continue reading, grasping the situation.

Those extremists opened a dojo, also as a port of Zen martial arts, where they gathered men who wanted to become strong. An armed group with a weak religious atmosphere in which there were warrior-monks, separated from other monks, which were more religious and spiritual, creating their own organization. And that's how the current founder of the sect started to lead a group of warrior-monks, creating new organization. That's when it underwent radicalization.

To put it simply, one ambitious guru offered independence, offering something similar to religious teachings, attractive to men which were less focused on religious issues. I see. So attractive teachings are devotion to martial arts, including modern guns.

Whether it's martial arts or firearms, if someone has power he wants to try it out. And so they come into contact with Ms. Ito and family, starting a side business. As subcontractors of Ms. Ito and family they performed a great number of special operations.

This honeymoon with Ms. Ito and family lasted till followers discovered accumulated money. I finished reading the explanation and sighted. I can't help feeling that it's Ms. Ito and family which made a mess here. It's probably how it really is. From what I see from the documents, this guru seems like a worthless person.

I read the rest of the documents and while looking closely at the reports of enemy's armaments and force military potential I wondered when it will be us that will become a target of some organization in that way. I had enough of this. I decided that I'm going to keep distance from Ms. Ito and family.

One way of keeping distance is to leave the country, but I felt like they also already took it into account. Unbelievable. It may turn out that the plan to use them ends in being used by them. Let's brace ourselves.

Before sleeping for exercise to sort everything in order in my mind I thought about the placement of troops. It doesn't take me too much time. Two seconds? Something like that. Dwelling deeply on such things usually makes things more confusing. You can't overrate the level of enemy. Of course I can't say overrating yourself and your intelligence is clever.

I decided to send Djibril and her subordinates in advance. Omar is independent and Gini with Ivan have characteristic for kids feature of being easily bored, so they don't fit for that mission. Djibril is also still a kid, though. Before advance team leave I say to Djibril to watch out and ask if she took food and water.

"It's alright. I'm not a kid."

"Kids always say that."

"Arata always say that."

I took a long hard look at her, after she told me that, but Djibril was putting her headgear and pretended to not see me.

That's exactly a kid's behavior – I thought and at the same time I was disappointed with myself by sending such kid to war. And to do it in a country like Japan which is supposed to be peaceful. Even with a double crisis it looked fine.

I was a little afraid letting Djibril and her group go alone by train, but send them off. Well, the guidance is in English so it will be okay. They were going by train several times by now and they have cell phones. Even with navigation system.

“After all you are worried about Djibril, huh?”

“No, not like about Gini.” – I replied instantly to Omar's words. Gini got angry and Ivan laughed, showing his teeth.

“About you too, Ivan.”

Now Gini is laughing. Seriously, is there no friendly country for kids? I feel like I could have served in such country's army. Although it could be hard with my age.

I plan to stay for a next night in the hotel. Entrusting handicraft contest to kids I decided to go for a walk. No, wont I meet her during the walk?

In the end I decided to get on a train. I felt that in a train I might meet with Ms. Ito and family. For the time being let's go to Shinjuku. From there I would be able to quickly go to Djibril's location if something happens.

Maybe it's because I missed rush hour, but luckily there were free seats in the train. What a petite bourgeoisie I am to be happy about such a thing – I thought. Ms. Ito doesn't show herself. No good. But well, maybe she waits for my move.

Still, Ms. Ito and family are smart. So far they are making us fight against enemies of Japan, only with the intelligence. And on top of that we will leave the country anyway. Sending a criminal organization against an armed cult group. The dream of private military company is collapsing. One stone upon

another won't be left. Beings harming Japan, after eating each other will be expelled. That's what leading someone around by the nose is – I thought.

As the side which is used here I have to think about the possibility that Ms. Ito and family will betray us. After thinking about all of this I got off at Shinjuku. Even if those women expect loyalty, in this business, and possibly also in their business too, there's probably no such things like promises.

Arriving at Shinjuku I think about what to do. Having no other option I moved toward the east entrance and walked to the Kinokuniya bookstore.

I'm thinking about buying a book about starting a business this time.

I called Djibril to confirm if the progress is going well and asked if it isn't hot on the roof. Djibril says it's okay. It sounded like with a forced smile.

That's what probably is a worried parent from the perspective of a kid. I look at the left arm. The cuff was still creased . What's wrong about being worried – I thought.

Next, I call Omar. I'm told that handicraft tournament ends in three hours. For night I send Ivan's tactical unit S as a backup for Djibril. Rest and some firing practice will begin from tomorrow morning.

Twenty seconds after I finished talking with Omar I got a phone from Gini.

It seems she wanted to use it all along – I thought, smiling.

“What's up?”

“I have a suggestion. How about making additional arrows?”

“Are you worried about ammunition?”

A woman with black clothes is reflected in the corner of my

eye.

“No. You said that leaving arrows will leave traces, but since they are handcrafted I wondered if it will be necessary.”

“I think they can find us through purchase routes of crossbows as it’s a firing equipment. But well, sure. Okay. I will buy the materials and come back.”

I head toward the south entrance of Shinjuku station. Heading in the same direction as Kinokuniya, as it adjoins with Takashimaya. There was Tokyu Hands, where they were selling materials we’ll need for arrows.

In the corner of my eye I saw that the woman with black clothes took off her veil. She shows her face, pushing aside her beautiful blonde hair. Tips of her ears were pointed.

I try to run away. Retreating, hanged up the phone. My arm was grabbed.

“Arata.”

“Oh, hello.”

Sophia. It was a reunion with my American friend.

△1. Well to sum it up the word used in “our” can also refer to one’s family hence his nickname for this organization.

△2. Don’t ask about from where he got those amounts. I don’t know either.

△3. While I’m not 100% sure by indirect weapons he probably means things like grenades, artillery works too but i doubt he can get those. Direct weapons are of course things like guns requiring direct line of sight.

△4. That’s how it was in the text. Probably means an unknown surplus of funds.

Chapter 4

Hands and Elf

Elf and Hands

Our reunion took place at the South Exit of Shinjuku Station, close to the store with electronics. We were standing together face to face in the middle of a crossing.

After looking at me like she saw a ghost, Sophia got teary eyes. Being under an escort by Djibril is usually annoying, but in this situation, although a bit too late, I realized the value of it.

Traffic lights are blinking. For now I just brought the weeping Sophia across the intersection. I was already disturbed enough. I haven't imagined that she would cry. No, wait. Calm down. I was completely disturbed. Even extremely.

I'm sure that she was going to say something like "Hi, how are you Arata?", but the natural-born American girl Sophia with her remodeled ears who I couldn't get rid from my memory was only crying. I again realized the importance of guarding. If Djibril was here, she could surely sympathize with her at a time like this as a fellow female. Setting aside the reaction of her puberty minefield.

"I didn't expect that you will come to Japan." – I said with shrilled and nervous voice. It was a big lie.

"You're alive". – I was agitated by her very frail voice. It wasn't like her. It was so faint I wouldn't have heard it, if her head wasn't on my chest. I get nervous, why it was so thin in the first place.

"Uh, yeah. Somehow."

I already want to run away.

“You haven’t got in touch with me.”

“I didn’t know any contact information to you. Not even to Lanson. Since I got free my contract expired long time ago anyway. If someone who finished his contract gets in touch with the company, for example asking for your contact number, there’s no way the company would give it to him. You understand this, right?”

Actually there was an awkward period when I became her enemy, but I didn’t tell Sophie about it and kept lying. In work I’m so honest, yet now I tell only lies. I’m getting pathetic.

Well, I’m glad that you are also fine. – I stay, without saying anything.

She lost much weight. I felt bad, seeing her like this after such a long time.

“You’ve become very thin. You overdid your diet.”

“It’s because of you.”

I couldn’t say anything. Standing and talking like that on the street also made me worried about people’s glances.

“So you care about friends. Well, I’m glad that we both live. When did you come to Japan?”

“More than half a year ago.”

“You’ve been staying here?”

“And Lanson too!”

“Why is that?”

“Because of you of course.” – said somewhat loudly Sophie and then raised her hand like she was going to slap me, but she withdrew it and got teary eyes.

“Sorry, but I don’t understand.” – I said honestly.

“You haven’t changed, have you? Like nothing had

happened.” – said Sophie, looking up straight at me. I was disturbed. What happened?

“People don’t change that easily.”

“I’m really happy that you didn’t get hurt.” – said Sophie, weeping. I have fully decided to run away. This is beyond what I was expecting. If you’re facing an unforeseen situation the first thing you do is escape. That’s the iron rule of a mercenary.

“Well, not exactly. You see, I’m here because of work. I have to go very soon. I’ll get in touch with you later. I want to greet Lanson as well.” – I said and escaped. It’s best to postpone private problems.

She gave up reaching out a hand to me and said slightly casting her eyes down:

“I’ll keep waiting... As long as it takes.”

I was finally leaving, but after a few steps I turned back.

“This time I won’t keep you waiting so long. What’s the matter? Sophie, it’s like...”

It’s just a beautiful girl. No, “girl” doesn’t fit her age. A beautiful woman? No, that’s not exactly it. – I frowned, thinking about random things.

“Anyway. Cheer up!.” – I said and left.

“... Are you still in this business?” – said Sophie. I said to my back as gently as I could: “I thought that if I would continue working there I will meet again with my friends or former superiors.” – I answered and went to Tokyu Hands. Well, apart from that, I’m constantly thinking about changing occupation, but this is a complicated story so I remained silent.

Tokyu Hands is inside the Takashimaya department store. I went to the DIY corner and purchased materials, from which it was possible to somehow make crossbow bolts. For wings for

stabilization plastic sheets would probably work so I purchased those. If it won't be enough, then I guess we will have to give up on handmade bolts – I thought. I don't expect much.

I'm leaving Tokyu Hands, and walk through the wooden decks, running up to the Shinjuku Station. I spotted Ms. Ito sitting on a bench. With hanging bags from the shopping I sat next to her.

From some reason Ms. Ito looked away from me and started talking. She looked fed up.

“You were a real playboy there.”

“Sophie is my former coworker.” – I said the truth. Since she saw us it doesn't matter.

“I imagined a more unsophisticated person though.”

“I don't know if she's simple or not, but she's a typical American girl. Like those from the movies. At least I remembered her like that.”

“I'm talking about you.”

“Me? Hm... If I were really a playboy, then I could have said a bit more thoughtful things to her.”

Sophie was crying, that's true. With a bitter feeling I was gazing down on trains stopping on the station. It's possible to look down on the platform of Shinjuku Station from this wooden decks.

Ms. Ito said, without looking at me.

“If you're going to make women cry, you'll end up being stabbed.”

“I'll change the job before that happens. Well, I still have the desire to send those kids to school.”

“So you're a playboy as part of the job.”

“No. It’s not like that. Uhh... You are picking a fight today, aren’t you?”

Ms. Ito scowled at me like I were an enemy of half of the nation.

“Because it’s an issue of national defense.”

“Is that so? Why, really? Anyway, we weren’t with Sophie even holding hands.”

“It Certainly looked innocent and inexperienced.”

“You may be right.” – I avouched.

“I’m talking about you.” – she said, glaring at me with narrowed eyes. Without looking at her I think about what to say.

“I’m aware of that.”

“So you knew it.”

“I don’t have any experience in love, so it seems I can’t tell what are the signs of it.”

Awkward silence. Darn, it’s too late to retreat. No lie will help me now. I kept silent and Ms. Ito sighs.

“Give it a go then.”

“If I fail the embarrassment will be too much to endure, so I’ll pass.” – I said honestly, looking at her. Ms. Ito laughed a little.

“I see. I let you off. Did you look for us?”

“Yeah.” – thinking about what is she letting me off from I started talking about the main issue. Wanting help for transportation. Also one illuminator, but it doesn’t need to be right now.

Ms. Ito listens to me and frowns.

“Can’t be done?”

“It’s not impossible. Accidentally we happen to have a driver of a stolen vehicle. It’s a generous person, who can take you, but you’ll have to return with a different vehicle.

“It’s enough. Thank you. By the way...”

“What is it?”

“I’ll do my best not to involve civilians and cause any disaster, but what do you think about this matter?”

“I entrust it to your common sense.”

“I see.”

Was that a test too? – I thought. Well, even if we’re armed, I want them to understand that we’re not criminals.

Sortie and it’s development

I separated with Ms. Ito and went back to the ryokan thinking about Sophie.

I hand over the materials for crossbow bolts and listen to the report from Djibril.

“There was a sea nearby.”

“Well, it’s Kawasaki.”

“Wind was strong. Bolts might miss.”

“Yeah. I thought about it when I looked at the map. Anything else?”

“I haven’t seen the enemy. It looks like they’re not prepared.”

“They can’t be neglecting the security, can they?” – I said. Are they going to deploy unprepared? If that’s the case then it will be nice and easy. Probably won’t go that well, though.

“I also got transport. There’s also a minimal amount of arms and ammunition. – I said, looking at everyone.

“After you get food tomorrow, we are commencing deployment. Take a good rest while you can.”

“After my instructions, in around ten minutes everyone went asleep.”

The old me would be amazed, but now I also went asleep after around twelve minutes. Remaining two minutes were for commander’s backlog.

I’m loosening the necktie and rolled into the futon. Two minutes before falling asleep I think about Sophie’s tears. Somewhat it hurt me a bit, thought it couldn’t be seen from me.

The next thing I remember is that I woke up at five o’clock. Whoever was first, now everyone is getting out of bed and starts to make preparations. I went shopping to a convenience store.

I buy up the portable food. It’s good, that in Japan it’s easy to get food which is suitable for military movements. Although most of it spoils quickly.

At 6 o’clock we vacate from the hotel and get on the “accidentally present” Toyota Hiace, moving from Tokyo to Kawasaki. It wasn’t a bus, but Hiace in shape is a bit similar to a micro bus. Speaking of Hiace, in Africa, Southeast Asia and Middle East it ranks with a popular vehicle for military use – Mitsubishi Pajero. It’s the most stolen car in Japan – I’ve heard. I think from Kishimoto.

I enter the familiar vehicle and look at the stinking of cigarettes interior. Despite that it’s a peaceful country here, I felt like I went back to the battlefield.

“In the end everything is the same.” - I said to Djibril, who’s sitting next to me.

Djibril looked at me politely , keeping the crossbow on her

knees.

“Anywhere is the same. Wherever we are in this world, god is watching us.”

I nodded, thinking about another thing. Someday I will take as many as possible of them to a place, which is not “the same”. I will make it happen so those kids can live and grow up there. I’ll get something good from all of this, as always – bit by bit and step by step.

I’m starting to give instructions in the car. I also contact Omar and the others by phone, who are riding separately. Hiace stopped at the outskirts of the warehouse districts. We thank for the ride and slowly taking the bags we disperse inside the warehouse district.

I walk slowly, holding just a cellphone. Wind is moving exactly as I imagined, when I was looking at the map. In the war imagination is essential. If you can’t imagine the blowing wind by watching a map you can’t become a good OO. Looking back now, when I was new in this business I couldn’t do anything.

Tactical Unit S, A ready – whispered to me Djibril by phone.

Tactical Unit S, C deployment complete – said calmly Omar.

Tactical United S, D in position – said cheerfully Gini.

Tactical unit S, E. Lot of people came out in the morning. Looks like there’s movement in the warehouse – said Ivan.

I leave observation to Gini and give Ivan’s unit a rest. They’re deployed on the roof and put up a tent with a similar color to it. They’ll probably spend that time to sleep there.

Soldier, who gets time to kill is quite a lucky one. Opportunity to save some energy can be considered as such, compared to being always on standby. Everyone gets two packs of chewing gum for that times. When both hands are busy, there’s no other

way to kill time.

Although work of an OO is speaking. I can't chew gum. That's why I'm killing time by using my imagination or by taking strolls.

I'm not on the field, because I would be only standing in the way. Therefore I'm imagining scenes of the kid's fights and battlefields in my head from the distance not too far away. It's all to protect them.

I pick up the phone.

"Omar. I think you're changing positions with the sunlight, but can you move another 100 meters? I want you to move under the bridge. Your current position is okay, but I feel like it attracts public attention."

"You're watching us, Arata?"

"As always. With my imagination".

"That's scary then. No, it's compelling actually. I was worried about it. Understood. I'm going to shift 100 meters and hide."

"Sorry about that."

I hang up the phone. Wind is blowing on my back. I look at the sea. I also saw few people angling. One, who was wearing an aloha shirt. He seem like a Japanese. And a young skinhead with a black leather jacket despite the strong sunlight, which is accompanying him.

"Are they biting?" – I asked quietly.

"No, I'm just killing time." – the man with the aloha shirt despite his looks, replied quietly. He has untanned pattern of sunglasses on his face. It was very characteristic.

"I see. But still would be nice to catch something." – I said and walked slowly. There's no bookstore or convenience store nearby. Just vending machines. I buy canned coffee and really

started to stroll aimlessly. Keeping a canned coffee in one hand I'm going to the park, which is few kilometers ahead.

I walk to the coastal park and sit alone on the bench. Full of emotions, I sip the coffee and eat the bento I bought at the convenience store. I make a trip to look for a trash can. I throw away the trash and go back to the bench. I gazed at how the color of the sea is changing with time. I recall mountains from Central Asia changing in the same manner.

"Here, there, present, past. In the end everything's the same."

Wherever I go I make children fight. Children-user, huh? Fuck you.

I bear in mind, what Djibril whispered to me.

"Anywhere is the same. Wherever we are in this world, god is watching us."

What shall I do for wherever to not be the same?

The setting sun disappeared, leaving last beams of light. I looked at the warehouse district from the park and checked the clock. It's almost time.

"Ivan, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Good boy. You took the weapons, right?"

"Yes. Everyone has them."

"Gini hasn't told me. You can also use a crossbow, right?"

"Not like Djibril's grandfather."

"You don't have to take much aim. Try to deliver the bottle."

Incoming signal. I said to Ivan that I count on him and took the call.

"Gini here."

“Any movement?”

Gini's tactical unit is at the opposite side to Ivan's. It's redeploying under the cover of the night and repositioning to look for sniping spots.

“No snipers.”

“That's a surprise.”

I wondered if the enemy feels so safe in Japan. I was worried about them. Everything is on a plate.

“Maybe it's a trap?”

“I can't think of so far reaching obvious trap. Stand ready, just in case.”

Incoming signal. It's Omar and Djibril. I switched the phone in a hurry, thinking that cell phones are inconvenient.

“Wait a bit Omar.”

“What is it Djibril?”

“It's like the data said. The truck has arrived. A single one.”

“Okay. Contact everyone we're proceeding with plan 1-1. Don't get hurt.”

“Understood.”

I hang up the phone and called Omar.

“Omar here.”

“It's about time. Which plan?”

“Surprisingly 1-1. The enemy are criminals with a delusion that nobody will attack them.”

“Is it okay for criminals to have such attitude?”

“Yeah, I know. Maybe they'll learn a bit from us.” – I said like I was really worried about them. Well, let's pray that they will learn and hire a private military company in the future.

Omar makes a stifled laugh.

“Criminals, moreover our enemy and you’re worried about them? Don’t you think it’s stupid?”

“It’s not like they’re criminals because they like it. In that way they’re like us, Omar. Anyway we’re here on a job too. We have to fight for a living. Let’s do it with no hard feelings.”

“Roger.”

I hang up the phone. I look from the park at the warehouse district, which got dark now.

I saw a light. It was an explosion. I was looking at the beginning of our operation.

War in Japan

In a place nobody knows about, a war in Japan has begun. First goes unconventional warfare.

Looking at the flames and lights from the distance, I draw a picture of the situation in my mind.

Ok, Ivan’s group has formed on the warehouse roof and their six is shooting in succession porcelain handmade grenades, bound to the crossbow bolts.

Crossbows are superior to guns in few ways. One of it is that you can bind a grenade to the bolts and use it like an quasi-grenade launcher.

Just in that moment the wind is blowing from the land to the sea. I deployed Ivan’s unit so that bolts won’t be blown away by the wind. It’s like I’ve learned in school, wind blows toward the sea.

Impact. It’s blazing up. There’s hardly any explosions. The small porcelain bottles are cocktails which burn, rather than explode. When they break up on the surface they create high

heat like white flames.

It makes great havoc. Criminals are screaming, transaction is interrupted. They escape, promising revenge.

There are only three places, where cars can escape. Two of those spots are already blocked by Omar. Cars lie parked.

There is a loud sound in another place. At the third spot Gini and Djibril set a trap on the road.

All at once, they fired from the crossbows at the runaway car. Outer plates have been penetrated and immediately after that, the screaming criminals finally see the small bottles on arrows.

Second explosion. Probably the car has been overturned. The ones who survived are promptly beheaded by Djibril's yanagiba kitchen knife, her substitute for a combat knife.

Gini's unit with cheerful expressions starts to gather fallen weapons.

Djibril's unit gathers corpses and squeeze them into the perforated car. They throw dozen of handmade grenades and shut the door.

Third large explosion. There's not much time left until police and fire brigade come. I give detailed instructions, stressing to withdraw fast.

Who's left now, Omar or Ivan? I think a bit. Incoming call.

"Ivan here. They're back. Half of them."

"Engage at once. Direct unit SC at them immediately."

"Understood."

Flames are ominously illuminating the warehouse district. When I was calling Omar, I become worried about Djibril and Gini. That's why cell phones are no good for this.

"Omar."

“I’m departing now.”

It seems like Omar and his child soldiers fired all at once, but I didn’t hear any sound. What I heard were the explosion and sounds of flames.

Omar’s tactical unit role is to finish off the enemy directly from close distance.

“Nice aiming.” – said leisurely Omar.

“There’s no time to be relaxed. Be sure to gain control of the entire situation.”

“Gotcha. I threw empty bottles to the car. During escape I was going to pick them again.”

After moment of silence I hear Omar’s voice again:

“I got all.”

“There’s possibility that there are weapons there. Check it.”

“Or money.”

“Which one?”

“White powder.”

“A miss, huh? I haven’t thought that there will be bartering.”

“So shall I take it and return?”

“We will pass. It’s bad for education. We don’t have options to cash it. After blowing it with the corpses, escape to the end of the seaward side. From there go on foot past the fence. Camera is checked during the day, so destroy it beforehand.”

“Okay.”

I put the cellphone in the pocket and waited for contact from Djibril and Gini.

I’m sweating when I think that something happens to those kids. I want to quickly quit from this work. Isn’t there a

peaceful job with income allowing to feed 26 people?

Incoming call. I pick up the phone.

“Are you safe?”

“Gini here. I’m safe. Djibril too of course.”

“Other kids?”

“Everyone is alright.”

“Great.”

“Our unit packed quite a number of weapons to the backpacks. We didn’t have enough space, so Djibril’s unit helped too.”

“Yeah, okay. Would be nice if there were also adequate bullets for it. Good job, Djibril too. Tell that to her. You are already in the car?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, we will meet later at the hotel.”

I hang up. I wanted to hear Djibril’s voice, but I had to be patient. I walked up to the station and went by train toward today’s lodge. At this time of day, I should probably arrive there faster by train.

Return and the evening meal

Going back I observe people inside the train and when I see that everyone is looking at their cell phones I recall I’m still in Japan.

Woman sitting before me is looking at me. It was Ms. Ito.

“Something happened?” – when I ask her, she says with a smiling face:

“I’ve heard that there were explosions in Kawasaki.”

“Oh. That’s why everyone’s looking at their cellphones?”

“Yes, probably. But everything about it is still unknown.”

I was about to say that it’s better that way, but remained silent. You don’t know who might listen. I change the subject.

“Did I pass the test?”

“Not yet. Have you found the white powder?”

“Ah, I’m sorry. I did, but disposed of it.”

Ms. Ito is staring hard at me. I froze in fear.

“I’m sorry, but I thought it will be bad for education so I burnt everything.”

Ms. Ito smiled.

“Haven’t you appropriated it?”

“Omar and my subordinates don’t do such things. That’s why I’m afraid they certainly burnt it according to my instructions. I’m extremely sorry.”

Ms. Ito seems to be in a good mood. She looks like she’s going to even hum.

“Is that so? I see. Then I believe you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, you’ve passed.” – Ms. Ito, a little embarrassed made a small circle with both hands.

“What?”

“That means you’ve passed. You suit to serve national interest.”

What’s the national interest? – thinking, I get off the train. Does it mean that we won’t become a new criminal organization at a convenient time?

I smiled bitterly. We won’t only because it’s bad for kid’s

education. But that's all. My heart is going to crush by making children use violence, but the day when I make their hands turn on drugs is the day of my demise. I would certainly die because of self-disgust. I'm not that strong. I can't be insensitive to such extent.

I arrive at the hotel. Today we stay at ryokan near – a bit away from a Nippori-Toneri Liner – Minumadaishinsui Park Station.

I enter alone and talk a bit with the hotel staff about the evening meal. I wait for everyone. There wasn't reports about victims or injured, but I can't relax when I don't see their faces.

I sit on an antic massage chair placed in the foyer and wait. It was a long hour. Djibril and Gini's tactical units S appeared first.

"Welcome back." – I said and look at everyone face. They all looked energetic. What a relief.

"I've brought it!"

"You don't have to show it here." – I said to Gini and then looked at Djibril, smiling at her.

"Good work. Thank you."

It seemed like she was smiling under her headgear. I felt like she's saying to me that she forgives me, but I don't know why I thought that.

"Are you tired Arata?"

"I want to say that compared with you it's nothing, but in fact I'm exhausted. I walked in a way as to not arouse suspicion. Meal will be soon. Get ready."

"Understood."

After they've returned, now I've been waiting for Ivan and Omar. It didn't take long. They are back after around ten

minutes.

“Why are you in the foyer?”

Omar is in high spirits.

“I was worried about you!”

“I would call you if something has happened.”

“Yeah, but still.” – I said to Omar, while patting Ivan and Hakim’s heads. Omar smiled and says: “However it’s a shame that extra income didn’t work out.”

“It’s okay. We get what we wanted. Besides...”

I think about this year and added:

“I hate drugs.”

Omar pat me on the back, saying that’s not my fault we didn’t get extra income and suggests to go eat.

“Very soon. I didn’t have time to even change my clothes.”

By the way, today as an experiment I set up sashimi. Kids didn’t have a custom to eat raw fish, in fact even fish was something rare for them, so it made quite an uproar.

The bravest and most curious in the world in my opinion Gini, first made move on tuna sashimi. She eats properly, dipping it in soy sauce, tasting it. Claiming it’s not bad, everyone started eating.

From what I’ve heard Gini’s ancestors were Italians, which has its remnants in her surname. Furthermore she was a descendant of the Copts, a christian minority quite common in Egypt. Near the village those girls come from, there was an abandoned christian settlement, so most likely they came from there.

Hakim started to eat gum, during eating the sashimi, so I rebuked him about it. He said that by chewing frequently

parasites die, showing me by this the difference in our cultures.

After the meal, everyone gathered in a big room and secretly organized the spoils of war.

I winced seeing that most of it were pistols, which are almost not used in our industry, but I was glad that we've found few real hand grenades, submachine guns, number of assault and sniper rifles. We got an unexpected amount of ammunition. That's great.

Most of weapons were all made in China. Recalling that China is a world's factory I racked my brain what to do with those pistols. Well, before leaving the country maybe I shall secretly deliver them to the police with other weapons?

Tomorrow we will do a test firing. I have to accustom everyone to weapons.

It's good that we had ammunition, which we can use for few trainings. While it's still not enough, each one can use around hundred shots. In that case at least somehow minimum adjustments and getting used to weapon can be done.

Problem is that there's not enough cleaning tools to maintain them, so it seems I'm going tomorrow to home center for supplies.

Shooting practice

Next day, we were headed to Tochigi. There's no place in Tokyo to conduct test firing with guns, but it's also impossible to use them without any preparation. There wasn't any option other than going to the mountains. I hesitated between Gunma and Tochigi, but in Gunma is our enemy religious organization, so to avoid them I chose Tochigi.

Leaving Ueno, we're heading to Utsunomiya by Utsunomiya line.

The old, refined woman asked me smiling where we are going. I said that we're going for training to mountains in Tochigi. She said that Kataoka will be good and I decided to take her advice.

Maybe Ms. Ito and family have prepared something there for us.

Even so, with 26 people, cost of train is pretty high. I was a bit worried whether we are going to have any surplus with 7500000 yens.

It took around 2 hours to get to Utsunomiya. When I think about it, that's pretty close. I'll have to change trains along the way to Kataoka. I get on train I've never ridden before. It goes to Kuroiso. It was a first time I saw a train with opening doors by a button.

Another 30 minutes in shaking train and I thought it's already a rural area, but there were too many houses to conduct a shooting practice. I've arrived at the appointed station in Kataoka.

I'm surprised by the prepared bus. Moreover a sightseeing bus.

"Please."

Ms. Ito came out with the appearance of a bus guide. I wanted to turn right away and go back. I feel as if I saw a friend that I wouldn't suspect of being an otaku in cosplay.

Tips of Ms. Ito's ears are red and she is hiding them with her hands.

"Well, you don't like it?"

"Oh, no. How should I put it?"

Djibril broke into the bus.

"Arata. This bus has a smell of danger."

While Ms. Ito was troubled what to say, I pulled myself together. I started to think that she must have a difficult job.

“Everything’s alright. I’ll take you to the practice ground right away.”

Leading by hand the dissatisfied Djibril we got into the bus. Djibril follows in silence. It seemed like a good thing, but you never know where it explodes on the adolescence minefield. Let’s be careful.

Another 30 minutes in a shaking vehicle. Place, where we’ve arrived was a regular shooting range.

In Japan you can’t legally possess and use a gun, but places for competitive shooting are one of the gray zones for firing. We were brought to practice grounds for such competitions.

Definitely the sound of gunshots won’t be a problem here. I see, now I understand.

Thinking that this place also must be cooperating with Ms. Ito and family, we’ve turned up at the shooting range and began training.

Because firearms are made in China, it doesn’t mean they’re unreliable. Central Asia was overflowing with Chinese weapons and it seems Japan wasn’t different. From my experience of using them, the problem lies in utilization.

The format of guns haven’t changed for years now, so it also has impact on it. That’s mature technology.

Guns from times long before my birth, before even my grandfather was born, even now are being reproduced. I don’t know if that’s good, but oh well. Omar explained that for small arms used by infantry, the limits are made by the human rather than technological development.

I picked up the remaining stack of pistols. They were clones of government. Official name M1911, from the year of

adoption. It was 110 years ago, even before the Great Kanto earthquake. During those years it has been improved, but fact it's used even today is probably proof of limits in humans themselves.

And yet, comparing to the past, infantry burden has increased even more. Now there's more equipment and it's heavier. It must be hard for Gini and Djibril to carry all of it. Walking with over 30 kg is tough. After all we need a robot car donkey.

After experiencing the weight of guns myself I sniffed my palms. They smelted of guns and oil.

Djibril is looking at me. I laughed reflexively, which embarrassed me a bit.

“Arata doesn't have to touch guns.”

“Well, I don't, but that's the work. It might come helpful someday if I learn how to use them at least a little.”

“No.”

Djibril took the guns from me.

“If you have free time, please go to sleep.” – she got me with that. I thought if she perhaps isn't thinking about me as a clumsy guy.

Well, indeed as someone who likes 3D figurines and buy them all the time I didn't become a modeler, but when I think about it I was working in a design company, so I'm not that clumsy. However I don't have such assertiveness to talk about it, so I decided to watch their training from the resting room, which was annexed to the shooting range.

Next to me sits Ms. Ito. I saw that she was dressed differently now. Her clothes were easy to move, suited for mountain climbing or hiking.

“Excuse me for before.”- said Ms. Ito bashfully with

completely red ears.

“Oh, no. Your work must be hard.” – I couldn’t say anything else. Silence comes, but disappears soon along with the sounds of firing.

Ms. Ito shyly pulled her hat and concealing her ears, said:

“You’ve seen the pistols.”

I remember about Sophie and thought that I have to get in touch with her.

“Yeah. Unusual.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. In military pistols are not used very often. Of course during particular situations or indoor battle it’s different, but 80 percent of our work is guarding, so...” – I said. I didn’t explain that young soldiers don’t undertake advanced jobs.

“That’s why we hardly use pistols, which have short range.”

“I see. You must have been surprised by all those government clones.”

“Yes, I was. Although they’re Chinese, all of them were from Russia.” – I said. Ms. Ito nodded, while watching outside the window. Hakim holds a government.

“Patent for government expired, so through this years, share of .45 caliber guns has been extremely growing on international market.”

“It looks hard to use for kids, doesn’t it?” – I said and frowned, seeing that Ivan got angry at Hakim, who was almost blown away by the gun’s recoil.” I must tell them later to not do any dangerous things. Putting aside that I make them fight.

“That’s because of improvements in defensive strength. Even in a fight between criminals there are more who’re wearing new models of bullet-proof vests. Resulting in recompense in

the form of large guns. Even a lot of law enforcement agencies finds 10mm not enough and urgently seek for an upgrade. For the last 20 years, after each decade, 9, 10 and 11mm calibers have been increasing in powder charge.”

Now I understand. Even policemen and criminals have hard times with those things in their world. Not to mention that they can be attacked by militarized people.

“I see.”

Ms. Ito is looking at me with an interesting expression. Her eyes are not sharp enough to call that observation, but they also lack passion to call that staring.

“You’re not interested?”

“I don’t intend to make my children criminals, nor do I plan to to do something like engaging with crime.”

“I see. By the way, I’m curious...”

“Feel free to ask.”

Ms. Ito unexpectedly looked at me with a serious face.

“Why don’t you make use of adults?”

“It’s the opposite! I wouldn’t care about adults. It would probably end on cursing and on that, that I would allow them to kill just about anyone.”

“You couldn’t order them to kill just about anyone, right?”

“There were only young soldier boys and girls around me. That’s all.”

Ms. Ito doesn’t have any sense of keeping distance, putting her face close to me and speaking like that. She had eyes like she was dreaming.

“You’re angry, aren’t you?”

“...Forgive me. It’s not like I’m angry at you.”

“I know.” – I was embarrassed when she said that to me at a point-blank range.

“By the way Ms. Ito, do you have bad eyesight?”

“Oh, yes. I do. Especially since I’ve forgotten contact lens today.”

“Right, I’ve thought so.” – I said, thinking if she and the family are okay.

Ms. Ito looks embarrassed.

“Pros see such things?”

“No, it’s not like that. It’s just the discussion was too prosaic for such dreamy eyes.”

“But we’re at work far away from dreams, though.”

“Tell me about it.”

We laughed a little.

Ms. Ito looked at me.

“Do you know about honey trapping?”

“No, not at all.”

Ms. Ito is toying with her own hair, which were sticking out a bit from her hat.

“It’s seducing to attain one’s end. I’ve heard it’s very effective.”

“You’ve heard it from an intelligence agency? No wonder I haven’t heard about it.”

“Well... won’t you fall for honey trapping?”

I’ve stopped moving, but in my head Djibril was intensively scowling at me, so I came to my senses.

“Isn’t it too audacious to explain a trap?”

“Ah, is it? Excuse me. I’m not used to it.”

I look at the embarrassed Ms. Ito and felt like I was looking at kids. Company, tribe and country. Despite good intentions, the unconscious evil just like that keep ripping out from this kids important things.

“It’s okay. Even without doing it, I’ll fulfill my contract.”

Before starting feeling awkward, I raised from my seat.

I return to the shooting range, joining with Djibril and the rest. I’ve been slowly starting to get angry. Is it unconscious evil again? It’s spreading in every country. It’s probably my enemy.

Djibril pulled my sleeve. I looked back at her. Her eyes seemed troubled.

“Is something wrong, Djibril?”

“Your face looks angry like you were going to destroy the world.”

“...There’s no way I would destroy a world, in which you live.”
– I said seriously and then laughed.

Nostalgic battlefield

Guns, the spoils of last battle are lined up on the shooting range. Three groups altogether. Whether they can be used or not is a complicated matter. It seemed the three groups were lined by the difference in ammunition. Originally they were destined for market, so it can’t be helped. Such a broad range and small commonality is unacceptable. In recent years, a regular army had heavy supplies, which they’ve been using to increase fire power at least a little, so I can see why the ammunition is so disparate, but in our broken supply it’s not a very good situation.

“Nevertheless, there are only old guns here.” – I said, disgusted a bit. Omar nodded.

“Well, those are smuggled guns after all.”

“Chinese production, but they seem like from America and Germany.” – I said, looking at a few of the antique pistols. There were stars on the grips, so they must be Chinese or Russian.

“That one is a copy of Chinese Tokarev. There isn’t any safety lock, so we won’t use it. But this one is specific for export that’s why it has safety lock, so we can use it.”

“And this gun?”

“This have too many safety locks, so it’s no good.”

“That’s dangerous.”

Lack of any safety locks is out of the question, even putting aside horrible outcome if the gun explodes. Too complicated one takes time until it can shoot and that’s risky as well. Removing safety lock can’t take much time in situations when you’re going to use a gun.

I wonder what Omar thought looking at my face.

“Russian design for pistols is unpopular. Tokarev is one of the few exceptions. If they still have easy safety locks we can use them. If you have ones, use them.”

“Got it. By the way, why Russian pistols are unpopular?”

“It can’t keep up with trends.” – said Omar and put a clone of Tokarev beside, taking in his hand a Mauser pistol, like one which appear in manga. Magazine and grip separately feel terribly old-fashioned. This isn’t even a gun from 1911, it’s from 18xx. That means mankind has been exchanging gunfire with this weapon for three centuries.

“So because of the trends, we have this reproduced rally of classic guns?” – I said, gazing at the guns. It’s not that I didn’t understand it, just couldn’t find it anything but strange. Why is

it like that?

Toying with the gun, Omar said:

“Bulletproof equipment is enhanced every year.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard about that. Even civilians have them now.” - I answer, without saying what I heard a little while ago. Omar nodded with agreement.

“I got it. Any maker of civilian firearms also made countermeasures, so in a problematic state where weapons are spreading and their improvements in efficiency, naturally latest guns for military use had to get an approval for being produced.”

“Yes. That’s why the old and big guns are...”

“Originally M1911 was popular in America, but it also spread abroad.”

“I see. By the way, why that Mauser and Tokarev lie together?”

“Same ammunition.”

“Right!”

“In China Mauser was popular since a long time ago. From the beginning of World War 2 there were many manufacturing facilities for bullets. That’s why even now they’re re-using them. Submachine guns, which were using this bullets also have long active duty. Look.”

Omar handed me a submachine gun. As for weapons gathered here it had normal design, which didn’t attract any interest. Well, I guess it must be a handy weapon. After all unusual designs are the losers of history, which didn’t become popular. I’ve learned this year, that guns familiar in design are usually the most useful.

“I see. Common ammunition is reassuring. Are we going to

settle the equipment around this?”

“That’s right. It’s a shame we lack assault rifles, but Mausers will do for them. For short distance we have submachine guns. Each one should properly use both of them. This Chinese submachine guns have the same ammunition as Tokarev. That is, same as Mausers.”

“Wait. Pistols as substitute for rifles?”

“This is how you use it.” – Omar installed a plastic stock to the Mauser. I see. It looks like a rifle.

“I feel I saw something like this in a manga. I think there was a wooden stock, though.”

“Wood is bending by temperature and humidity.”

“Oh, right. Sorry for meddling. With the stock recoil won’t be a problem for the kids, even with large pistols.”

“Yep.”

Standing in a line Ivan and others are shooting guns. Ivan is a skilled sniper, but above all he’s successful when it comes to teaching things. I looked over the shooting range, holding up in arms Hakim and telling him to not do dangerous things.

Kids are using over 100 years old weapons and kill each other. I couldn’t find it anything but foolish and obnoxious.

“Humans are stupid. By trying to pretend to be clever all the time, they become even more stupid.”

“Socrates, isn’t it?”

I was just mumbling without thinking when Hakim said it, surprising me. Unexpected name comes from him. Unfortunately I didn’t hear anything about him, except his name, but I think he was a Greek philosopher.

“You know a lot.”

“He was popular in the village.”

I let off Hakim, being impressed by him. I was thinking what kind of village that was, but it could be just only Japanese people that don't know about Socrates. Anyway, if in the ancient times there were a man, who was saying same things as me, that means world hasn't made any progress.

I felt strange, looking at the reproduced guns. Despite lack of progress, having to survive is painful. It's disappointing as much as inevitable.

When I held Hakim, children gathered around, saying things like: “me too, me too”. I decided to hold everyone in turns. For some reason Gini broke in and made it impossible.

“It's unfair. Arata.”

“Gini, you're big.”

“I wanted to get taller.” – said Gini, extremely serious. Such freewheeling expression was like her.

“Then next time I'll give you a ladder.”

Gini has scowled at me and gone somewhere. I wouldn't know what to do if even Gini had reached adolescence. I don't have time to even think about guns. I imagine that such lack of mankind progress, made master Socrates postpone philosophical issues many times by everyday hardships such as looking after kids.

Djibril's lecture

I took a casual look at the shooting range at how everyone practices removing the safety device and head toward convenience store to buy them lunch. Apparently one way is 4 kilometers. As expected from a rural area.

I walk down the road, where even cars don't show up before

noon. Maybe this area isn't good for cultivation, because neither paddy fields nor plantations can be found here. Just trees, growing thickly on both sides of the road, overgrown even. I feel it's hot here. Central Asia was also hot, but here it's tough, because heat is uncomfortable. I saw that Djibril came along.

"Escort." – said Djibril from the diagonal distance of 50 cm, pulling her headgear. She was completely hiding her face.

"Ah, Ok. Sorry to bother you."

Since the tears of the elf, I haven't felt reluctance in escort. It's not like I didn't have doubts, but for some reason crying Sophie makes me feel bad. That's what's affecting my judgment.

Muddling about Sophie, I told:

"After all I need to train shooting, I have to be able to at least protect myself."

"There's no need."

Djibril is point-blank. After all she probably thinks I'm clumsy. I made a bitter smile.

"No, I mean it's okay. Maybe I look like that, but I'm not that clumsy."

Djibril removed her headgear. She shook her head, swinging her a bit wet hair from sweat.

She examines me with an accusatory look.

"I'm really not."

"Whether you are or not is not the point here."

"...So what is it?"

I looked at Djibril. After looking back at me head on, she turned away.

“What more do you expect? You can do anything, Arata. By reading a map, you know a lot of things. Despite being from a foreign country you can normally talk with us. You can eat things like chumps of fungus deep fried in oil, raw fish, anything. Arata, it’s really like you would have wings, you came from afar and watch over the world. You see higher and further than anyone else, you read the enemy movements and give commands.”

“You give me far too much credit and stop calling shiitake a chump of fungus, besides I would tell you about other things you got wrong separately, but leaving that aside, how is this all related with me learning to use guns?”

“If you even learn how to use guns, you won’t need us anymore, right?” – said Djibril with low and crying voice.

I was about to say how absurd this is, but I failed. I got annoyed. Very much annoyed.

“Look at your skills, don’t you think we’re at the same level.” – I said as I walked. What Ms. Ito said is like thorn in my chest: Why I don’t fight along with them?. Djibril is sensitive, so it seemed she has realized my real intentions.

And if she know, then what? – I thought. Isn’t the fact that children are fighting strange? Above all I can’t stand that I make them do it. That’s the real issue, which I can’t stand. During each battle I wonder what will happen if this kid die. I was displeased and walked in silence. Hearing a subdued crying I turned around. Djibril was sobbing like a child.

I stand still in silence. I don’t know what to do at a time like this.

Eventually I just said:

“Sorry, Djibril. Sorry. You don’t have to worry about that. I’ll be always beside you. The thing I hate is my helplessness, not circumstances I find myself into.”

“If it’s only about the circumstances I think of myself as happy even.” – I said that very late, still I don’t know if it reached Djibril or not. She was crying.

Bad mood and bad news

I was in an extremely bad mood. Operator of the battlefield, the OO probably should know what to do, but fact that I made Djibril cry and things she must have been accumulating inside, severely hurt me. I thought that both crying Djibril and Sophie are unfair. I also want to cry. I buy a portion of food for 30 people. I thought I was going to personally carry and bring it back, but I couldn’t possibly do it alone, so I decided to get assist from Djibril. I didn’t see her expression, because of her strictly pulled over headgear. So my mood worsened even more. We returned, without speaking a word through all 4 km of the way back.

I handed over the food to everyone and handed out drinks bought in a vending machine. Conclusion – it’s too heavy to go back and forth to the convenience store. Ivan is impressed by vending machines, which are everywhere. He said that it would be nice if they were also on the battlefield.

In order to escape from Djibril, I take bento and tea from the store for two people and look for Ms.Ito. In the resting room, where I was sure she would be I found sitting the elegant old woman.

“Huh? Where has Ms.Ito gone?”

“Who knows.”

“I see. I brought food, though.”

“Don’t bother.”

“Right, I expected that I’ll hear something like that, still I was thinking if we were the only ones eating, without saying anything it would be somehow...”

“So I shall say you’re thoughtful or maybe shy and sensitive?”

“Both will be right.”

The refined woman showed an unrefined malicious smile. I raised an eyebrow and, well, said that I leave it here. I ran from Djibril to take a meal here, but it didn’t go very well. After all I’m in poor condition.

The old woman spoke, looking sideways at the bento:

“Just few moments ago I got a message. I have bad news.”

“Whether it’s bad or not, it depends on contents of the information. Let me hear it.” – I said it reflexively. I’ve learned when I entered this business that our perception and evaluation are very different than others.

“First, the armed religious group, which is your target, joined forces with the Asian criminal gang you attacked.”

“I think that information didn’t get to our target, then why?”

“I’m sorry. There was insufficient explanation. The place you attacked was originally a transaction site between the religious armed group and the Asian criminal gang.” The old woman said, keeping her sight pointed down.

I see. So that way their target from the leader of the sect will move on us? It’s quite hard to think, when you are in a bad shape. I cruelly drive away Djibril from my mind and exorcise crying Sophie like a devil, and try to think calmly. No, it’s not a thing that I can think about like that.

I don’t know how much ruthless it may be, but the life of children is at stake.

“The target priority changes then?” – I said.

“... At this stage I can’t tell.”

“I see. Can you provide information to the target?”

“What information?”

“About our protection of the guru.”

“... I can't say we weren't responsible for this. That's why we can cooperate on that matter. But are you alright with this? I don't know if it's an ambush, but if we spread the information, they will probably expect counterattack and attack.”

“It may be so, but it's hard to protect when there are two targets at the same time. Speaking of what may be better in this situation, we might as well unite the enemy movement.

“Very well. I think that criminal gang lost their face, so probably they will use large-scale equipment.”

“Like armored vehicles?”

“I don't think it will be attack helicopters or armored vehicles. It's impossible if you think about hardships of importing such things. However possibility of machine guns and rockets can't be ruled out.”

“What about artillery?”

“I think not.”

“Okay. If that's the case then I think it can be done somehow.”

“We also feel sorry about this. We couldn't predict enemy moves. It's inexcusable. There's nothing else I can say, but...”

I looked at the old woman. I thought that maybe she will rise the reward, but it doesn't seem like that. The old woman said: “About the illuminator you requested.”

“Yes.”

“I was able to acquire this. If you don't mind an American product. Domestic ones haven't completed valuation tests, so I think it will be hard to get them.”

“It's sufficient. With this I will finally improve fighting

capability to 90%.”

“So much?”

“...So much?”

I thought about differences between people, who are not involved in military affairs. Information is important. It exists exactly because of intelligence agencies. OO like me are the same. They deal with variety of information, the only difference is quality of controlled information. At any rate the old woman nodded. With doubts, but it seems she nodded.

“Well, we’re not specialists in wet job. That’s why we leave it up to you.”

“What is a wet job?”

“Rough stuff.”

“I see. Thank you. When will you get the illuminator?”

“We decided to purchase it from the company you belonged to. There’s already approval from the American government. Do you know manager Claude Lanson from Far East?”

“It’s my former superior.”

“Tomorrow take illuminator from him please. Meeting place is here.”

“Thank you. Tomorrow, so Lanson will...?”

“No, he hasn’t said anything.”

“Alright. Thank you.”

I put the bento on my knees and taking the opportunity look at the paper, I’ve got.”

“I have to get more pistols.”

“...I’ll do something about it.”

“Thank you. Where’s the guru?”

“Currently, we’re helping to hide him. As for the location...”

“The guru is likely to chose a location suited for combat.”

“There was a religious organization military camp in Gunma. It will change the objective, but what about it?”

“You have maps of the target, right?. Okay. Let’s do it there. What’s the shortest amount of time it takes?”

“One day.”

“Alright. Assuming our deployment and giving information will be day after tomorrow, then can you deliver information to the target after 3 days?”

“Yes, certainly. But are you sure? You don’t have to hurry.”

“I want to establish the expected range of enemy movement as fast as I can. At the current situation the enemy reaction is unknown. It’s not a good situation.”

Saying that, I quickly ate my lunch and drank tea in plastic bottle in one gulp. That was the fast eating, I couldn’t have done before.

Putting my hand together I say “gochisosamadeshita” and rise from the seat. Striding, I came to the shooting range. Impulse. I need an impulse to do it in one breath.

“Gini, is there Gini?”

Gini was eating or right after it, because she didn’t wear her headgear. Swinging her red hair she run to me, but her cheeks were pouted.

“Just once.”

I held Gini in my arms and turn around 360 degrees.

“See, it was like before, right?” – I said vigorously and put her down. Gini was joyfully laughing.

“Golden eagle would say that, but I’m a human who walks on

the surface. The scenery seen from above was completely different. I was thinking about learning horse-riding.”

I stroke Gini’s head.

“Horse-riding you say. Alright, I’ll put as much effort as I can to make you learn it. Djibril, is there Djibril?”

“I am.”

Djibril was standing beside me like a ghost, wearing firmly her headgear. Her voice is freezing, but head feels heavy. It’s unsteady.

“I’m going to Tokyo now. Are you disposed for escorting?”

“I am. I’ll follow.” – said Djibril, without looking at me. She’s still in a lousy mood. I was starting to lose all my vigor, but somehow managed to gather myself up. You lose your will, if you’re too carefree.

“Come with me.” – I said to Omar, and quickly explained to him the situation. Then we left the shooting range.

Golden eagle and information

Walking to the convenience store, I called a taxi. I could do that directly by cell phone, but enemy’s ability to gather information are unknown for me, so I was cautious just in case.

By taxi I go to the station and from there I get on the train. Tampering with phone, I look for a transfer. If I go up to Shinjuku, then going by Shonan-Shinjuku line won’t take more time than going by shinkansen. I enter the Shonan-Shinjuku from Utsunomiya. Busy day – I thought.

“What’s the rush?”

It’s important to have spirit. Without it I can’t even talk to ~~my daughter~~ Djibril. If I could say that honestly, I wonder if it will be good. Thinking about it I looked at Djibril who sat next to

me. I guess she was in a slightly better mood. I could see her eyes from her headgear. She has been glancing at me.

Those eyes were a bit red. I was hurt by it, but didn't show it.

"I don't know if I should talk about this..."

"You said to me to talk about complaints." – said Djibril like it was an important agreement.

Maybe because of religion, but they're taking agreements extremely seriously. Well, America is also giving much weight to contracts, so perhaps Japan is the exception. After a slight pause I talked about information given from Ms. Ito and family.

Djibril is thinking. She looked up at me.

"Golden eagle wants to come out fast from the cloud of information and see the surface from the sky, but humans don't know about that."

"Poetic expression."

"Humans, they don't understand. How golden eagle feels."

"Fortunately I'm a human." – Djibril stared at me, when I said that.

"Could you really be a human?"

I smiled bitterly.

"However you struggle, I'm a human. You're giving me too much credit."

I'm rather fed up with this. Sometimes I think how it would be like if I had things like golden eagle's wings or military talent, Djibril and children are talking about. In fact as for me I'm always afraid of hurting them. War is a bitter experience.

"Golden eagle always says that." – Djibril said and again didn't show her eyes. She has been in low spirits.

I wanted to take Djibril's headgear and give her an hour lecture that I'm in every way human, but I would lose heart while doing that, so I gave up. Besides if someone will cry again because of me I'm going to cry myself.

I repented myself that I have to keep my spirit for long time. I thought that with vigour I can match with golden eagle, even without being him, and fly like a paper plane.

"Kids always say that." – I said turning like me and looking out of the window.

"Don't be peevish."

"I'm not peevish. I'm not peevish toward kids."

"Turning one's face and looking outside the window is something peevish people do."

"I'm 31." – saying so much I indeed must have been peevish – I thought.

Being peevish is not reasonable against Djibril, since she's in puberty. Reluctantly I stopped looking outside the window. Djibril's looking down.

"Every time you talk about age."

"Because it's the only factor you can't change. Difference in our age will never shrink, it'll always be my win." – I looked at Djibril and said.

She raised her head and scowled at me.

"Haven't you thought that it's cowardly?" – after she said it to my face, I remained silent.

"In some degree." – I said and after that I started to explain myself.

"But it can't be helped. If you don't really think like that you can't do this."

“What can’t you do?”

“Being an adult.”

“You can stop it. Then...” – Djibril took a big breath and said to me.

“We’ll be on equal terms.”

“Kids always say that.”

No good. Reflecting on my own words, I thought it’s going around in circles.

In the end after continuing discussion with no progress, I set foot in Shinjuku. I thought Djibril might be angry, but it was the opposite. She seemed in a rather good mood. I thought that adolescence is difficult. Ten times more difficult than military issues.

“Where now?”

“To Shinjuku Central Park.” – I said and started to walk.

Chapter 5

Prisoner of the Golden eagle

Shinjuku Central Park and the former boss

There is an artificial waterfall called Niagara in the Shinjuku Central Park. I've always been thinking it's an embarrassing name, but well, it was surely built with momentum of the current times when such feelings doesn't exist.

I was stunned seeing people who have been fishing there. They were a party of two, wrapped in bandages.

"Are you alright?" – I called spontaneously. I recognize them. I saw those two fishing on the day of the raid to obtain weapons.

"What the fuck you want? It's not a spectacle." – said the younger one, a skinhead in leather coat, scowling at me.

"Cut it out." – said the older man with the aloha shirt, scratching the bottom of the bandage.

Damn it. It reminded me that others don't have such good memory like me.

"Oh, excuse me. Are they biting?" – I said. The older one might have recalled me, as he smiled bitterly and said:

"You see it yourself, right?"

Indeed, there's no way to be able catch something in the park's artificial waterfall.

"Weren't you working in Kawasaki?"

"I am on vacation for the last few days. Because of that accident, you know." – when I said that, the older man seemed to lose interest in me and swung the fishing line.

“I see.”

“Oh, excuse me for interrupting.”

I decided to walk. Djibril is frowning alternately at me and the man. Suddenly the older man called me.

“Buddy.”

“What is it?”

“If you’re looking for a love hotel, go to Kabukicho. This place is not good for such things. At this hour there’s limited-time sale too. It’s better to hurry. Enlightenment through empathy. The empathy will bring enlightenment. Right?”

“... I don’t know what you are talking about, but thank you.”

“If you are not aiming at mating, you can’t do what you do.”

I walked toward the area called Fujimidai, smiling bitterly. Djibril follows me immediately.

“Acquaintance?”

“I wouldn’t go that far.” – I said and wondered if those two were involved in battle. If they were it’s my fault. I put effort to minimize damage among civilians, but I greatly regret it wasn’t enough.

“I probably did a wrong thing.” – I murmured and Djibril nodded.

“They looked like a ruffian and militia though.”

“You mustn’t judge people by appearance.”

I said it in a haughty manner. Djibril reluctantly nodded and said that she thought like that by the way of how they were holding guns.

I looked surprised at Djibril. Even with the headgear I could see a smile on her face. How did she got that?

“It didn’t seem to me like they had a gun. How did you know

it?”

“It’s a nice feeling, thinking that sometimes even a human can have a better eye than golden eagle.”

“That’s what I told you, I’m a human. So, how did you?”

Djibril looks proud. Grasping my sleeve she stretched herself and confessed everything into my ear:

“Spots when you can hold a pistol are limited and shoulders of a person who has been using military guns for many years are lowered.”

“I see. That’s an important thing you’ve told me. I have to change the job before everyone’s shoulders deteriorate.”

Djibril had an expression like she was saying: “And you again about that”, but her good mood didn’t seem to change. She spoke with a little indifferent expression:

“There are also people like that in this country, aren’t they.”

“Yeah, but there’s not much of them though.” – I said measuring my words. We went up the stairs.

Fujimidai is in a high place. It seems we have to hurry a bit. There’s no sakura already, but there are other blooming flowers. Djibril stops. She takes a breath looking at the flowers. I see. Those children must have preferred beautiful flowers instead of amusement parks – I thought.

“Watch the flowers” – I said. “I will go talk with my former boss.”

I walk slowly. From what I saw from his back it felt like his hair was slightly whiter than I remembered. The rugged leather jacket didn’t look so fitting on him now.

He was sitting on the bench in Shinjuku Central Park.

“So you’ve come? I always knew that it will be like this someday.” – Lanson said quietly and deeply emotive, without

looking at me.

“It has been a long time.”

I approached from behind and bowed. Lanson looks like he’s smiling. Lanson – my superior from the time when I worked in a private military company.

“The elf was saying you’re dead, but I didn’t believe it.”

“It was luck.”

“I don’t think so.”

“It’s true.” – I said and sat beside.

Lanson is watching the multicolored flowers, without looking at me. In the corner of my eye I saw like Djibril was nervously touching and admiring flowers.

“I didn’t expect that you will be in Tokyo.”

“To think that a Japanese will be my savior.” – Lanson said quietly.

I looked to my side at him. It appears he was talking about me.

“Don’t worry. Oh, right. Forgive me for the late report. Every soldier who was with me that time lives. Not even a single one died.”

“You didn’t just save us, but also allies among enemy side, huh? Well done.”

I smiled.

“To be praised by you feels like tickling.”

“Appointment was for tomorrow, but I expected that you will come today.”

“You taught me that. Things you can do today should be done today.” – after Lanson suddenly changed the subject I answered him and he ironically laughed.

“Is that so? Now when I think about it, it looks like a fantasy story.”

“Fantasy?”

“It seems like fantasy. A modern legend – you can say. To think I was teaching you something.”

I look at Lanson’s face from the profile. I want to know what he is talking about. Smiling bitterly I slowly said in different words:

“What are you talking about? It’s not like you.”

Lanson looks at me. The glint in his eye hasn’t gone yet.

“It’s your fault, children-user. Or should I say golden eagle?”

“I don’t care.” – I said, smiling bitterly. I thought he was teasing me.

“So I’ll call you golden eagle then. It’s a strong name. Why that golden eagle returned to the human side?”

“To ask for guidance. And to get the illuminator.” – hearing that Lanson slowly nodded.

“I’ll make the elf deliver your Excalibur. And instructions, huh? With pleasure. If there’s still something I can teach you.”

Aw shucks – I thought. I felt like Lanson got completely old and weak.

I think about what to say. I have to answer him something more concrete.

“It’s not a big thing. So far I’ve been working like mad. I’ve got slightly better results and reached a high spot, but I think it’s thanks to hard work. However I’ve noticed that mere hard work won’t do from now on.”

“And?” – said Lanson slowly. I looked again at him and saw, that he’s been watching flowers and Djibril. I think about what

to say.

“I wonder what shall I do.”

“Golden eagle forgot how to fly among humans?”

“I’m a human!”

“No. You’re golden eagle, not a human. Your very existence is right now a fantasy.”

While I keep silent wondering if he’s okay, Lanson speaks:

“Before in Central Asia, I was going to die once. That time I was saved. From all of the people, the one who saved me was my subordinate, who was supposed to be a prisoner in the first place. From away, tens of kilometers away and yet. He easily overcame distance and circumstances.”

“I just had a radio at hand. So what?”

“That’s the fantasy! We saw it. That day reality was devoured by fantasy. Maybe corrosion of reality made by fantasy gave her strength. Shaking in the corner of the room, the elf girl suddenly came back to life and took the lead, taking us from there.” – Lanson was recounting the story calmly with his sunken eyes.

“It’s fantasy! I saw a single man whose strikes have shaken the wall between reality and fantasy. Fists of one man summoned the fantasy. The world’s wall of ordinary life. It’s shaking before the fists of one man. The world creaks by single strike of just one man, who’s hitting with all his might.”

“Stop it, please. I’m an insignificant man.” – I said getting more and more irritated. I thought that’s a creepy way of praising. Lanson spoke like he didn’t know what’s on my mind:

“You just want be like that, don’t you?”

“For argument’s sake let’s say I do, and what?”

“It’s simple. Stop pretending to be a man and just fly like

golden eagle is supposed to. Who said you have to concern yourself with human affairs?”

I pondered over what Lanson has told me. He wants to say it in a roundabout way, but in short he probably means to do the same good job as always, when it was going fine.

It's impossible – I thought instantly. I can't act as I was up until now. That's because I know that tactical units I operate are Omar, Ivan, Gini and Djibril. There's no way I will be able command without worries anymore.

“...I love humans.” – I said faintly.

Lanson ignored me and just laughed scornfully, like he already knew about that.

“Nevertheless behaving like a human is not the way golden eagle should show his love, right?” – Lanson quietly continues, like he wants to persuade me:

“I can just tell you this: you may be able to summon even greater fantasy. You have the power to shake the reality. I don't know what is going to happen thereafter.”

“If this fantasy makes a good impact on children, then it's fine.”

“I said I don't know how it will end up.”

“What to do if you don't know what is going to happen?”

“Fantasy is a possibility that lies ahead of reality. There are good fantasies and bad ones.”

“So call the good one?”

“I don't k...”

I interrupted Lanson, rising up from the bench. I can't stand this.

“No, okay. Enough. I was worrying what should I do. I was

thinking about it all the time. I was sure that I'll find the answer if I ask, since you have much higher position than me and achieved success."

I looked at Lanson, thinking it's the last time I look at him.

"But it's okay now. I'll come up with something for myself."

For some reason Lanson smiled. He looked pleased.

"I see. It's fine then. Golden eagle is golden eagle, not a man after all."

"I'm a human and there's no fantasy. But I'll think for myself."

I turned away and walked. I said to Djibril let's go and left.

I didn't want to admit it, but seeing the superior I still respected falling into some strange religion was disappointing. I thought that in that case it was better not to come.

That's when the first explosion occurred.

Tragedy in the park

Explosions were loud and consecutive. I sensed that Djibril covers me and with resent pushed her down in the opposite direction, protecting her.

Impact hit our backs like in TV dramas. It wasn't a shock wave, but debris. I automatically opened my mouth in shock. I couldn't even make a groan. I can't open my eyes.

I don't know how much time has passed. I came to my senses and lifted my head. I had gritty sand in my mouth, since I haven't shut it. I look down at Djibril. She looked like she was drifting on faint scent of flowers, keeping her eyes tightly closed and waiting for something.

"Are you alright, Djibril?" – when I said it she finally opened her eyes. She got up confused and straightened her clothes. Her

headgear dropped, showing disheveled hair”

“I’m alright. I guess.”

Normally Djibril would probably start talking and give me a preaching about how important is my body. Without sparing time for her to preach me I took her hand right away.

“You can stand, right? Let’s hurry.”

Djibril stretched herself and wiped my face with her headgear. I smiled bitterly and said that my suit was new.

“Are they attacking us?”

“Probably. And you have disheveled hair.” – when I said that Djibril bashfully smoothed down her hair with her hand. Without time to smile I look around.

Fujimidai was in a horrible condition after explosions. Broken trees, blown away flowers, burning grass smelling strange. Quite a lot of people fell, some of them looked like they will never move again. We could go across the walkway next to the Tocho, but bridge leading there was ruined.

Cars which were passing below were stuck in traffic after serial collisions and were making loud sounds from klaxons.

I glanced at the surroundings and remembered about Lanson, so I rushed back to the bench where he was sitting. I thought it was the last time I’ll ever see his face, but it didn’t take long and I see him again. Look at me, I’m not golden eagle – saying in my head, I run up to the bench.

As a soldier with long military service, he curled under the bench and it seems he endured explosions. It’s something I learned in this business. A good professional behaves the same way like cowards.

“Are you alright?”

“That’s my line.”

“We have to get out of here.”

“Bridge has fallen. The opposite side is burning. There’s no way but to go toward Niagara.”

I thought for a second about the things Lanson pointed out.

“No. We can’t go there.”

“Why?”

“It’s probably a trap.” – saying that I saw the flames.

Even if explosive materials explode and there is damage made by debris, there is not so much flames. I assumed that for making them there have must been taken some special military measure. It may seem too careful from my side, but I didn’t like the perspective of being sniped from high ground.

Lanson wanted to say something, but he dropped his shoulders.

“If golden eagle says so, then it’s certain. If you, who can go higher than anyone else say that.”

I ignored his words and scanned the area. I’ve already decided I’ll ignore it and think for myself from now on.

I look for the enemy. There’s not a single thing that looks like enemy. They took this place in such a hard way, yet there is no soldier in sight. That’s why it came to my mind that this military action is probably the doing of a minimal number of smart and finesse soldiers.

Those who survived are running toward plaza near Niagara. I want to stop them, but I don’t have nothing of so called persuasiveness.

“So what shall we do then?” – said Djibril, coming closer to me. Seems like she decided not to wear the dirty headgear. I smiled. Well, I guess Lanson is someone who she can show that cute face.

“Now there is a stir at Niagara. It’s best to prevent somehow the sniping.”

“I... don’t have a weapon.” – said Djibril, like she was apologizing. I smiled. I want to stroke her head. Couldn’t restrain myself and stroke her a bit. Djibril fixes her eyes on me, waiting for my word. So I speak:

“There must be something to do. Besides my plan is to someday make you all live without weapons. Let’s have a rehearsal of it.”

Djibril still looks at me and makes a sad face. I smile again, pretending there’s time for it. Still I haven’t came up with a solution, but Djibril haven’t asked about it, she said something else:

“And then you will fly off somewhere?”

“Maybe, but I won’t let you say that the golden eagle didn’t love forests and woods where his wings were resting.”

All those people keep call me a bird, it’s annoying – I thought and ended the conversation. Looking down with one eye at Niagara and withering flames, I slowly started to move.

Words I’ve used may be cool, but I couldn’t look more stupid with a frightened face and dirty suit from the soil. I want to do something cooler than words, but I feel that will end with me dead fast.

I peeked, thinking that I desperately need a bulletproof headgear.

Situation was worse than I expected. At the place I looked at a random shooting spree took place. I made a grimace. Three men wearing white coats with guns. Accurate shooting. Assault rifles? People trying to escape are being shoot from behind, treading on ones that already died, they fall down like a domino.

Can it be called a military operation? – I thought. As someone involved in military or maybe bearing in mind my own life I spasmodically wanted to rage that this kind of thing isn't a military operation, but even if I justify it, that won't help people now. So I tried using my eyes and mind to think if there is anything I can do.

Eyes are desperately looking for a clue. Jumbled screams and bellows of people are disturbing calm thinking. I cut myself out from the surroundings and look for a hint, which can even not exist.

In the past a village disappeared because of my instructions.

At that time, soldiers under my command climbed to the high ground and shot to death people, who were trying to escape.

The current situation is a time to start over – I thought. Watching from the high grounds are not soldiers, but me. Starting over, starting over, huh? I smile bitterly. It's not starting over. Dead villagers remain dead. But that's because I can't ignore it now.

From what I see, there are no resources to improve the situation. No weapon. What to do without a weapon? Dispatch soldiers. As a conclusion so obvious for the OO I called Omar.

“Arata, what's up?”

Omar's composed voice. It relaxed me a little.

“Is there Ms. Ito around? A bus guide with black hair. Now she probably looks different, though. Or an elegant old woman will also do.”

“I can find neither.”

“It's an emergency.”

Receiving a call. I switch phones.

“Ms. Ito.”

“Yes. I understand the situation.”

“I’m glad you bugged my phones. Can’t you transport a sniper into my position right away? If we don’t hurry many civilians will die.”

“That’s out of my jurisdiction, so I can’t give orders. Still I can give a request.”

“Do it at once.”

“Understood.”

I look behind. Flames are not going down, but burn more and more.

“However right now there are flames everywhere at my position, preventing any sniping. Before you come here first you have to get through the fire.”

“So I have to cooperate with a fire brigade. That’s also out of my jurisdiction, so I think it will take time.”

“Please hurry. Lives you have to protect are in danger.” – I said.

“Because I speak with a calm voice, don’t think I have no emotions.” – retorted quietly Ms. Ito. At the end her words shiver, which also cooled me down a bit. I see now. Well, that’s true.

“Forgive me.”

“No. Forgive me for getting angry. I’m very grateful for cooperation. I’m going to hurry, so excuse me.”

Call cuts off. I make a sour face. I got the feeling it’s again the matter of jurisdiction. Ms. Ito must have it hard too, but people in Japan are the same.

Situation below indicates that chaos is ending. Those who had

luck have escaped, but there are still over two hundred people restrained by the enemy.

Voice is coming from the megaphone. While it says: “We raised to action to follow righteous Buddhist teachings.”, I’ve heard “don’t move”. Woman, who looked like an OL was starting to escape, but she has been shot from behind. There are screams. I look with one eye at the clock. Even if it takes the sniper half an hour to arrive, it’s going to be a rough 30 minutes. I thought that I should have called Ms. Ito earlier, but sending one or two snipers at this time here would have been desperate. I comforted myself that operation requires at least minimum of information.

Enemy is chanting the name of the guru and preaches with unpleasant voice something about Buddhist teachings.

I recall that name. It was the guru we were going to escort.

Enemy undress women and make them stand before him as a shield, continuing the sermon.

By just looking at the scene I have atrocious urge to kill, but at the other hand I was curious what he’s thinking and what’s his objective. Assuming it’s a mere criminal act, the enemy is playing an intelligent game. In that case is this also a part of military operation? Marginal situation. I think about strategy.

I look at the wristwatch. Five minutes has passed. Five more. It seems the enemy is going to barricade himself, but in the meantime he’s shooting curious onlookers. I can’t read any purpose in his action. I need a weapon.

Loud voice is getting through the burning flames. I look behind. Before I noticed, Djibril was already staring there with as a surprised face as me.

There was a Range Rover, flashily running up the hill road through the flames. Japanese police is bold – I thought, but the vehicle has stopped halfway. I saw the blond elf with teary eyes

jumping from the inside and running toward me. I'm shocked. My senses are shocked, but the body ran to her. I grab her hand and draw her.

"What are you doing?"

"Lanson said to wait, so I waited. But the fire and everything. I thought you might be here, so..." – said Sophie with runny eyes. "You idiot" – I said to her. Tips of her hair are scorched and frizzled. Her face and body dirty no less than me.

"So... I went to save you." – says Sofia, restraining her tears. It's okay, just don't cry, don't cry – I said. I look at Djibril.

"Djibril, I leave her to you."

Before she managed to refuse, I gave her a look that I don't want to increase uncertain factors any more. Djibril looked angry for a moment, but then she pulled Sophie's arm and said to go with her to pull her away from me.

"Wait... wait. I'll fight too." – said suddenly Sophie. I looked at Lanson. He shook his head in denial to not blame him. I opened my mouth:

"No. It goes without saying."

"I brought weapons."

"Take them out at once." – In a second I changed my opinion and said heartily. Necessity has no law.

"Inside the car."

When I looked I saw that Djibril was already running through the flames.

"I'll ask just in case. There's no illuminator inside by chance?"

"But it is."

I looked dumbfounded at the burning car. My Excalibur.

Djibril rolled the headgear around her hands and opened the

door, carrying baggage from the inside. I take my jacket and put out a small fire, which was spreading. I swore that I will buy one more before leaving the country.

“Now I’m going.”

“It’s too late.” – said Djibril. Great fire took the car and it’s surroundings.

“Well, I’ll prepare that illuminator and information terminal.” – said Lanson in a pitying tone.

“...I’m sorry.”

Accepting the apology I looked at the weapons Djibril brought. Crossbows and batons. So that’s the extent of legal weapons. I was utterly disappointed. It’s impossible to fight with this against the opponent with assault rifles. Situation hasn’t changed for a better at all.

Bow and elf

I look down at the crossbows which Djibril put effort to bring. Only two. After all fighting with two crossbows is unreasonable. That’s what I felt, however since there’s no other weapon I thought for a bit.

“Impossible after all... I’m sorry.” – said Djibril. She was discouraged as well. I pat her head.

“No, you did great.”

I continued without saying anything to Sophie, who was worrying about her burnt hair.

“We have weapons. Problem is how to use our number advantage to compensate for differences in accuracy, firing speed and range.”

“You don’t say that all those things aren’t enough?”

“War is not so simple. Having edge with one or two units is often sufficient. The important thing is how you make use of them.”

While comforting Djibril I put together my thoughts. Sounds of gunshot haven't stopped. I have to hurry.”

“If we could at least have an edge in accuracy that might work out though.”

Sophie looked up at me.

“How much specifically?”

“High-angle fire at a distance of 100m, just to have a certain hit at the silhouette.”

“That's fine.”

I stare at Sophie after what she's said. Not only me, Djibril is staring with me.

“That's true.” – said unexpectedly Lanson.

“Huh?”

“Greenwood has been practicing crossbow shooting since she came to Japan.”

“I wanted to be like elves.”

Jaw-dropping, completely futile and preposterous effort, but at the other hand I was a bit relieved that Sophie hasn't changed inside. I was imagining what would I do if she had changed too much.

“I see. It's a relief that you're yourself.”

“What?”

“I was thinking how to take responsibility. I want you to follow me. Would you take a look if you can shoot from there?”

I took Sophie to Niagara waterfall and nervously looked down.

“From here you will lower your head and shoot. There’s cover here, but enemy doesn’t have one. You can fire from high-angle, while the opposite side can’t because of structural nature of his weapon, so logically this spot gives us a clean shot.”

“...As always, great operating.” – said Sophie, looking at me. When I looked back, she joyfully smiled.

“If we can’t keep the hit accuracy this strategy won’t work. That’s what has been troubling me. Problem is that we need a mirror in order to shoot from hiding.” – I said.

Djibril took out in haste a brand new mirror from her bosom. She purchased it at Ameya-Yokocho. It was a hand-mirror.

“Have this...”

“Thanks. I’ll buy you a new one next time.”

“It’s, it’s okay. I’m... an adult after all. – said Djibril all of a sudden. Maybe she express like that her nervousness before battle.

“I’m waiting too. For a compact, though. Be sure to buy a new one, Arata.” – Sophie blurted out something with a screw loose. But well... that’s what she always does. Only time when she acted strange was when she cried. Sophie, you have it going on – I think. So in the end we’re going to combine two mirrors and use them as a periscope. I prepared the sniping position.

“You can miss, but just don’t hit hostages. If the enemy use them as a shield, halt fire and change position.”

“Got it.”

“Djibril. Take a baton and wait for orders near the stairway. I’ll give instructions if the enemy comes there. There’s possibility that he will climb there to strike back.

“I got it.”

“I shall go too.” – said Lanson as well. He flourishes his telescopic baton.

“I can’t beat you in judgment, but physically I’m still better.” – Lanson said and walked a bit with Djibril. They climbed the steep staircase and hid at both sides, taking standby positions. I take a deep breath. I look at the improvised periscope next to Sophie.

“When you’re ready initiate the sighting shot.”

Sophie connected a hose to the crossbow and started to draw a bow with the force of gas.

Construction was the same as a rapid-fire model I saw in the store in Ikebukuro, but it looked much more powerful.

“I thought you pull it with a cog-wheel.”

“It’s the type of equipment in our company. Don’t touch the string. It will easily cut off your thumb.”

Apparently the strings in crossbows used for sale on Japanese market are strengthened to the limits.



Nodding, I looked at Sophie's profile. Aiming skillfully, she spoke:

"You know, Arata."

"What is it?"

"I'm happy we've met again."

While I was wondering if my face turned red, Sophie pulled the trigger. Even from here it could be seen how 100 meters away the surface has shaken by the thrusting of the fired metal bolt. While enemy didn't know what's happening, Sophie took correction to the point of impact and released the next projectile.

The arrow pierced the head of one of the enemies. Screams and absolute chaos. Hostages are trying to escape together. The enemy seemed to hesitate on what to do: secure hostages, hide or hit back. Eventually that hesitation gave us a final chance. Puzzled hostages were escaping, so the enemy couldn't use them as a shield anymore.

Taking the opportunity Sophie fired three arrows during this interval. The second enemy's chest has been pierced, but he didn't die instantly, trying to draw out the arrow. Fourth arrow hit the chest again and the second one also stopped moving. One left.

The one who is left is coming here shooting. Bullets impact nearby, but they just scrape off the stone wall. Enemy approached stairs and dashed up. Scattered people were running in zigzag at the plaza before Niagara waterfall.

"Djibril, Lanson!"

"Understood."

When enemy finished climbing stairs it was his end. Djibril accurately hit enemy's spinal cord on the back of his neck and

Lanson grabbed his weapon and shoot it in the air. He hanged over on enemy and secured joints of his arms. I called Ms. Ito to arrange remedial measures.

Escape

In the end all was accomplished by Lanson and Sophie, so me and Djibril retreated.

Everything went on Lanson's company record. Investigation also concluded it was generally positive.

I don't care about achievements or thank you letters. I just felt quite a relief that we were able to make off without being shackled.

Avoiding public notice I walk from Shinjuku Station. My appearance is a bit conspicuous, but it cannot be helped in this case.

I notice that Djibril wears a dirty headgear.

"Shall we buy clothes and change before going back?" – when I said it, walking in silence Djibril looked up at me and slightly nodded. I patted her head.

"If you are thinking about the hand mirror, I'll buy you a new one."

"No. It's just..."

"Just?"

"Black hair is better than blond." – said Djibril with extreme seriousness, however I didn't know what she meant.

"I don't know what is this about, but I suppose your hair hasn't shrunk Djibril."

"...I don't know."

In the moment I was going to say something, the

“acquaintance” has reflected in the corner of my eyes. A company of two fishing visitors, such mismatch with Shinjuku. They were in a much more injured state than before.

“What!? You didn’t go to Kabukicho mister?” – said the older one with eyes taking me for a fool. I kept silent thinking about what to say. I recall his warning. Setting aside who he is, it was certain he knew beforehand that tragedy will occur.

“...That girl is something like my younger sister. Are you okay?” – in the end I said that much. Djibril, who certainly doesn’t know Japanese for some reason is gazing at me accusingly. I pat her head.

“Oh well.” – for some reason the older man said it with a dispirited expression. Is he a cooperator of Ms. Ito? Or maybe an enemy? I decide to tread lightly. If he’s an enemy I’ll have to run away as fast as I can.

Older man looked at me and said:

“Are you ex-JSDF?”

“No. But, well... something similar.”

“Is that so?” – older man said and flicked with a finger box of cigarettes, which he took out from the bosom. He’s holding it between his teeth and smashing the filter. He offers me one as well. I declined, waving a hand. People engaged in military affairs are solicitous about health. They don’t do drugs, cigarettes or alcohol.

Odd looking four people are talking on the side of a road. Older man is putting box of cigarettes in the pocket. That behavior looked like a repose of souls, which gave me a strange feeling.

“The ones who caused this, you know... They desperately hate the guru.” – said quietly the older man, taking cigarette from the mouth. I ponder for a while.

“That’s the opposite from what they were saying during the crime.”

Certainly they were praising the guru and religion – I think, frowning.

Older man looked at me and laughed ironically.

“You’re young, so how about using your brain.” – said the young skinhead. I smiled grimly.

That meant the facts were opposite. Radical followers were terrorizing people, chanting names of guru and god. When leader is socially dead, the organization takes devastating blows. That’s why they did this. Making female hostages naked was also part of all of that. They disposed of few of their military personnel to gain something important.

“In the end it’s the same like blowing oneself and involving innocent people.”

“Well, that’s how others may see it. But you know...” – Older man said, squinching his eyes and with all of his might inhaled the cigarette.

The smoke from the cigarette leaks out from his mouth. I waited till he ends breathing out.

“They were presenting the guru wives and maidens. In the name of religion they believe in.”

“So that’s their revenge?”

So that’s their own fault – I thought. Disgusting. I was really glad that Djibril didn’t understand Japanese. Still I need to keep her away from this. I moved to protect Djibril from those two.

“Don’t be so disgusted. Religion or money. The only difference is what you believe in. Whatever you chose if you’re betrayed it’s the same tragedy. It’s a living hell.”

I stood in front of Djibril and grabbed her small hands,

holding my hands in the back.

I knew she swallowed, but I ignored that.

“I understand, but I thought that before you believe in something a bit of a skepticism can’t hurt.”

The older man laughed. He apparently thought that it is the way of thinking of young people.

In characteristic for me way I furrow my brows. The information that we protect the guru was handed to them by Ms. Ito by my suggestion. Thought that it could be me who caused this incident is depressing

“And you, what do you believe in? In the country, or maybe money?”

“I work for money, but I believe neither in them, or the country.”

“Is that so?”

The old man for some reason looked at Djibril and smiled slyly. He throws the cigarette on the road and stomps on it with his boots. His bad manners caused a scowl of dissatisfaction to appear on my face.

“Oi, Kajita, we are going!”

“Alright.”

The young skinhead called Kajita threw me an angry glare and walked away.

The old man takes three steps and looks at me.

“Till next time, Mr. mercenary. Good shooting skills.”

“For both sides, if it’s possible, it would be better if we won’t meet again.” – I said just in case. The old man smiled bitterly.

“You know it doesn’t work that way. I don’t know about you, but if you breach our territory it will end with retribution. We

have a duty and we adhere to it, you know.

“You will only increase the number of casualties”

“Probably yeah.”

A carefree response, taking into account that lives are at stake. I furrowed my brows and walked away taking Djibril with me.

Cancellation of contract

It got complicated. I thought about that while changing clothes, buying new clothes in Uniqlo. It seems that Djibril doesn't like the clothes, because in the end she buys only a skirt, from which she makes a temporary headgear.

“There weren't any cute clothes?”

“There were some that I could put on indoors, if only Arata saw them.”

Perplexed at what to say, in the end I left the shop without saying anything. Without a word on the way I went to a shop with men's apparel and bought clothes. In adjacent other boutique I queued in a line with Djibril and bought a pocket mirror. Djibril strongly grasped the mirror and swore that she will take care of it, but I was pensive. I wondered if what the enemy is doing is humane, though the results were great.

I don't know if at this moment the guru's protection has any worth. Speaking truthfully as an informant he isn't relevant to Ms. Ito and family. Rather there wouldn't be a problem if police took care of him and there is also a possibility that he will start to confess to something that he wasn't asked by them.

During the shaking of the train to which I entered, I'm thinking about the fishing visitors. I also need to think about them. Only things not making money.

I realized that in front of me sat Ms. Ito.

“Good work.”

“No. There were casualties after all.” – Ms. Ito smiled gently and shook her head.

“However I think it ended on a minimal number. The police reached an agreement with your former company that they hired them as a test since a few days ago.”

“Reached an agreement? I understand.”

Well, in that case the police will save face and private military companies developing in Japan will receive a nice achievement.

I nod at that, on which Ms. Ito smiles and says:

“In such times the front line breaks the most often. Though I think that for the Police that is painful. Especially troublesome must be the issue of the crime scene.”

“In this all i would like to know how many more or less people wonder about the magnitude of casualties.”

“You really want to know?”

“No. It would be probably bad for children’s education. I will leave it without asking.”

Ms. Ito smiled a bit and then her expression clouded over.

“Although a trouble appeared.”

“Protection of the guru lost it’s meaning, right?.”

“Yes. He killed himself.” – said Ms. Ito with a tone being certain that it was a doing of a murderer.

“We are cancelling the contract?”

“Unfortunately.”

I sighed. The only thing left is the criminal group’s resentment.

“So this is the end.”

I don't even know how the enemy looks. I felt that I lost to him. Leader of an armed group, betrayed by the guru, conducted many military operations unworthy of praise from the humane point of view, but there is no doubt that in minimal time and labor he achieved excellent results. Ultimately even the main goal that was killing the guru, they managed to achieve without dirtying their hands. In Japan there are also amazing people. I still have a long way to go.

Ms. Ito raised her eyes and staring at me opened her mouth. Curious what she would think about my thoughts. Her expression seemed to me to sympathize with me with all her heart. I have doubts if she has awareness that it was us that came first with this whole proposal.

"We also regret that it ended this way. Partially we also feel responsible."

"Since even a little then I'm glad."

I wonder if she understood the sarcasm? Ms. Ito winced and lowered her head.

"I'm sorry. From my side I can say that I'm really very sorry."

"No, no. Please raise your head. It's not your fault."

Ms. Ito raised her head and looked at me with a slightly trembling eyes. Djibril still holds me by my sleeve with all her might. I am probably stuck with creased sleeves at each newly bought suit.

"That's why we are thinking of offering you at least minimal help." – said Ms. Ito.

Minimal help, huh? – I thought.

"And specifically, what kind of help?" – I said.

"We want to speed up your departure from the country. We will take care of formalities like preparing a plane and such."

“When?”

“Even tomorrow.”

I calculated in my head how this all looks. So besides the fact they are ruining my sightseeing tour, they still want to drive us out of here. Diplomatic way of saying that you are exiled. Setting that aside, I didn't have any bad feelings beside the way in which the opponent will reveal himself. I decide to say outright:

“As an expert in military affairs I consider, that tomorrow it will be too late. The enemy started to act. And if so, he probably wouldn't want to give more time for preparation and will take over the initiative. I mean, that he can carry out an attack even today at night.”

“Then... we have a problem.”

I nodded. Ms. Ito really had a troubled face.

“We are dealing with an above average opponent. Tomorrow there will be an attack at the airport and there will be a disturbance again. I don't recommend that, taking into account potential victims.”

Ms. Ito looked at me.

“...Privately your concern about the citizens of our country makes me really very happy.”

“That means, that as an organization you don't have problems with a shootout?”

“No, ah...It's not like that.”

Poor Ms. Ito, I'm not looking forward to bullying her, nonetheless it doesn't seem to me that lying would help any of the sides. Thus with a sour face I continued:

“Since there is such a problem, then wouldn't you consider some sort of aid?”

“What to do...”

“The easiest way would be to escape today. Or transport us to base of Japanese or American military and then leave the country.”

Ms. Ito makes a grim face. Well, permissions issue – she can’t use military. In that case she can probably do something tomorrow at the earliest – I thought. It’s already evening. That’s why I proposed a realistic approach:

“Since you can’t get those, in that case I ask for a consent so we can fight.”

Ms. Ito sighed lightly.

“Can I ask for a bit of time?”

“Of course.” – I said and then sent a message from the phone to Omar and Lanson.

No matter how this cooperation will turn out, I must get my Excalibur.

Meeting

We got off with Ms. Ito at Kuki.

Ms. Ito always appears and disappears in unexpected times, however she can’t get off from one train to right away catch a next one.

Not far from the station stops a coach. The driver turned out to be Omar.

With a bitter smile I look at the coach. I asked Djibril, which didn’t let go of my sleeve to go ahead and take care of the weapons prepared for tactical units.

Djibril stares at me. When i told her that I will come shortly , she got on saying to not forget about the hand mirror.

I scratch my head wondering if it's some custom or something. I looked at standing motionlessly Ms. Ito. It seemed that someone came to her too, so I was looking at that, waiting for what she will say. I'm standing like that for 5 minutes, when suddenly from the stopping train poured out passengers returning home. The last travelers entered the convenience store in front of the station.

Ms. Ito looks at me and says:

"I have a message from higher-ups. They will close an eye on this coach. And about conducting battles they aren't interested about it, but they count a lot on as small as possible casualties among civilian populace. That's how it looks."

"I understand. This time it went how it went, but next time I would like a prosperous coexistence."

It seems my words surprised her, because Ms. Ito looks at me surprised.

"You would accept another mission...?"

"Half of it is lip-service." – I said laughing.

"Please excuse me for being a miser, but I would ask for an advance payment for the return flight."

"Alright. I'm sorry..."

"Yes?"

"It was our strategic error. After we delivered weapons we didn't check what the target is doing."

"The opponent is competent, that's right. Problematic, but well. That he is capable doesn't necessarily have to mean only bad things."

"Please." – Ms. Ito handed me an unfolded sheet of paper.

"This is from me. After you read it I would like to ask you to not keep it and throw it away. This is a list of the criminals

hideouts addresses.”

“Thank you very much. I will get rid of it before I get out of the bus.” – I said and went up the stairs to the coach.

“Omar, what about the driver of this vehicle?”

“I asked politely for him to go home. I shit you not.”

So he just hijacked the bus. I smiled bitterly. So this is what this closing an eye meant?

“Alright. Take us to Tokyo. In the bus I will tell about the operation.”

“Roger.”

The bus moved. I sat at the tour guide seat and looked at Ms. Ito who still looked down. I hurriedly averted my eyes.

Enigmatic sore loser

I explained to everyone in a simple way the situation. I said that the opponent already accomplished his mission and next that we are a target, and that we have to start acting alone to reduce damage.

The children listened without much bewilderment, though when I finished the explanation they had an expression as if they wanted to continue listening.

“Anything else?” – when I say that Gini and Ivan immediately raise hands. I permit Ivan to speak. He gets up.

“We didn’t lose, right?”

“Well, before the battle we found ourselves in a position that needs a lot of effort to win from. The enemy by avoiding an encounter with us, defeated our employers – Ms. Ito and family.”

Ivan isn’t satisfied by this explanation. Instead of him spoke

Gini:

“Does that mean that the enemy surpasses golden eagle?”

“Politically.” – I said to not introduce disarray among the children. I didn’t say that wielding an authority in military means using politics and diplomacy.

Politics? Ugh. – complained children.

“And what is this reaction” – Frowning I spoke to the microphone putting my hands on the hips.

“Well, our golden eagle is gaining more and more success in military world, but as you know he is a good man. Completely unsuitable for politics and scheming.” – said loudly Omar driving the coach and smiled broadly.

A brutal introduction of me – I thought, but it seemed that a lot of children were of the same opinion, because they were nodding.

I was disappointed.

“In that case it’s enough if he will only take care of military matters.” – said Djibril. All the children nodded with agreement.

“Indeed in this matter our golden eagle is second to none. I see.”

Gini and Ivan satisfied sat on their seats. Quite a biased view, but I didn’t dwell on this topic. Maybe that was the children’s reaction for shock. If I think about it in this way, then I even pitied them.

I want to protect those kids. – thinking, this time I decided to carry out an operation while stuck in this misunderstanding.

Last reinforcements

The bus is driving in the area of the Kita-Yono station. Looking at an old, high apartment building I order for the vehicle to stop. Right next a Range Rover is standing. Gini with her friends ran in his direction. The girls receive dangerous presents from Lanson.

Dangerous, but I'm very glad for them. Truthfully speaking I would like ammo for that, but life isn't that good. He didn't manage to get it. Well, let's stick that it's better to attack with difficulties with insufficient ammo, then to be attacked having it.

It seems that today I won't get enough sleep. I rotate my shoulder, thinking that i will sleep tomorrow in the plane. Omar is staring in my direction, so I point a finger at myself. I turn around, because Omar is shaking his head negatively. It's an elf, happily running in our direction.

"What happened Sophie?"

"I left the company." – she said smiling in a white hat. It was the most cheerful smile I saw till now from her, but I didn't manage to say that. Or rather before I managed to do that from my mouth came a sermon:

"What are you saying. And what are you planning to do now?"

"I managed to find you after all, so now there is no point in staying there. You are leaving the country, right?"

"... I have a firefight in plans before that."

"So sign me up for it too."

"No."

"Why!?"

"Why... listen Sophie. I'm telling you because we are friends. I can't afford to involve a friend in danger."

"Oh, Arata. You are my *boyfriend*, that's why I'm telling that to

you. If a boyfriend is in danger you go to his rescue. At least that's what I do."

Omar interrupted the conversation before I managed to make a sentence in english to protest about the definition of *friend*.

"Ms. Sophia."

"Sophia Greenwood."

"Ms. Greenwood. It's dangerous and there is no remuneration."

"I know about it."

"I vouch for her abilities." – Djibril also interjected. And I thought that at least she is on my side. I felt brutally betrayed. I was worrying about Sophie, but Djibril's betrayal hurt more. Though I didn't experience it, I wondered if that's how a father feels, when his daughter stops wanting to bathe with him.

"A lot of bolts and crossbows are left. She will be an additional fighting strength Arata. Even with our improvised grenade launchers." – she said, not looking at me.

Did she mean to think radically logical? I look at Sophie. She took off her hat. She has short hair. So she cut the burned blond hair? It really hurt me. Sophie not having an idea about my feelings was waiting with an expression as if holidays and birthday came at the same time. Words fail me.

"Fine, I'm counting on you." – said Omar with seriousness.

Sophie smiled brightly and shook his hand. No one really asked for my opinion.

Chapter 6

My way to end war

Operation: Peaceful Hammer

The bus will soon enter Shinjuku ward.

So we're moving out in 10 minutes. I ordered to bypass below Dai-Gado, crowded by drunken people, and go to Otakibashi-Dori Street. We stop at the traffic light.

It was a shock for me that there are crowds of drunken people, despite that many people died close to this place a few hours ago.

Shock? It's not a shock. I was the same before leaving Japan. Remembering it made me just shudder by my former meanness.

I notice many standing policemen. It's fortunate. Before we act, they will protect us from the enemy. When it comes to a fight, police armed with pistols will be powerless, but elimination of powerless objects also takes time. Enemy must hate it. That's why he's superior. After all he hasn't made a move yet, even after noticing us. There is also a high possibility that he gets results by taking precautions.

Enemy is strong. That's okay. Strong enemy is an intelligent enemy. Intelligent enemy means, that there is a possibility for reconciliation. Depending on terms, he may withdraw his troops.

With the military operation in Shinjuku Central Park, enemy achieved maximal effect with minimal losses. I can't approve the methods, but even in that aspect I'm sure he had discernment to minimize deaths among his men. By that

discernment he may decide to not fight with us.

If war is one method of a rough dialogue, then enemy has strength, that is intelligence to just talk. I want to get along well with him.

Golden eagle loves people. It doesn't mean he behaves like them though. It's not how he shows his love. I recall the exchange with Lanson. I wonder how golden eagle, how I show love. I think for a second. I can only give orders as a OO. There's nothing else. If I can include love in them, it's only through hard work. Only by reducing victims and winning.

I make up my mind. I take a deep breath. Subsequently, having to worry about Sophie is painful, but for a moment I thought to forget about it. If I don't forget about it, operation will deteriorate.

Vehicle starts moving. I bowed slightly to the standing policemen and took the microphone in hand.

"Prepare equipment for the illuminator."

I equipped the illuminator. It's my eyes. I stood up from my seat and integrated the illuminator camera with all kids. I put on a headset. It's my ears. Kids are my body.

"Djibril."

"Yes."

I looked at Djibril, putting illuminator from above of her headgear.

"I'm counting on you."

"I'll put my life on it."

"You don't have to. I won't make you fight in such battles."

I smiled and patted Djibril's head. Gini has been already lined up behind.

“I’ll do the best I can.”

“You better do.” – I said, putting the illuminator on Gini. I sensed danger when Sophie stood up from her seat, so I said: “Sophie, put it yourself.”

“You aren’t saying anything about my hair.”

I tightened my lips, and then in silence attached the illuminator on Sophie.

I thought that such equipment for elf lacks refinement, but I said something else: “I didn’t want to drag you into this.”

“Is that how you show your love?”

Djibril said “no” right away. That’s a nice thing she said.

“Because we are friends.” – I said and looked over at everyone.

I also put on a headset and take out a tablet terminal, which looks like a thin board. I was spinning it with fingers of both hands. The picture came up on an already activated screen.

“Confirming booting up of the illuminator.”- I said gently. I heard my gentle voice in everyone’s ears. Everybody turns on a switch on the side. Integrated information system is displayed within the visors. High sensitivity compound camera for capturing enemies conducted a test with laser illumination.

Now, when I had my Excalibur, I thought that I’ll be doing it like this. I mean calling out children with a gentle voice.

Even when I will be dying, there will be no fear in my voice. Until the very end I will be trying for there to be hope in my gentle voice.

“Confirming activation of the illuminator. Starting data linking.” – said gently Djibril, glancing at me. I nodded.

I inform about the connection.

On the screen of the tablet, which I am holding in my hand, data about the position of allies is shown. At the moment status of the ammunition, that the children input by voice, was displayed. Displayed green meant that everything is alright. Preview on everyone was unified and the screen simplified to the level of a computer game. A feeling that I didn't have in a long time came back. No, in the past those were only games, now it's different.

Djibril stood at the front and reported:

“Additional tactical unit P ready.”

“Okay. Calmly. As a golden eagle I will be covering you. Golden eagle knows the road you came from your village to this place. I always look after you and hope for your happiness” – I said gently.

“Begin sally. After you split up into four S units, each one of them will begin march. Each unit will be ACDE respectively. We count the enemy from B1. Unit SA will be lead not by Omar, but by Sophia Greenwood.”

“Understood.” – said Sophia, shaking her cut hair.

“Omar will be the driver and protect me.”

“Roger.” – nodded Omar. The bus is driving into the Okubo street. The mass of the vehicle doesn't allow it to pass even 20 km per hour.

“Four tactical units S, commence sortie.”

Omar opened the door while driving.

The children jump out of the side doors one after another. Sophia opened her eyes widely from amazement, but since she probably already decided to take part in it, she successfully jumped on the ground.

The children immediately went in line with the bus and then

overtook it. They already could ably drive on roller shoes and with ease rushed through the road. Every one of them saluted me.

From this moment I'm unable to predict what will happen. In spite of all of that I felt that I can do it. The current imagination allows me this much.

I called in my head the image of running Djibril and her group. On the tablet screen normal icons are displayed, but taking a shallow breath and narrowing my eyes I was able to picture an accurate image of Djibril.



“Djibril, you don’t have to hurry that much.”

“Sorry. Understood.”

“Wipe your sweat.”

“All right.”

I smiled. I switched the radio channel to Gini.

“Gini, you run ahead.”

“But...”

“You can do it.”

“...I will do my best.”

“That’s right. Gini is a capable kid.”

“Praise me more.”

“If you do well.”

I imagine the dissatisfaction on her face. But only for two seconds. Two seconds and Gini signals her subordinates with her fingers. I made a satisfied face. Excellent Gini, keep it up.

Gini’s tactical unit SE suddenly accelerated to 43 kilometers per hour. In my head I imagine a driving truck and holding on to it’s luggage platform Gini’s unit speeding on the roller shoes. The driver of the vehicle behind them is terribly surprised.

Gini asked if I even see her expression after I whispered to her to not distance themselves too much.

“That’s a secret.” – I asked politely and gallantly.

Ivan’s tactical unit SD stormed on the roller shoes into the building being one of the hideouts. They simultaneously throw grenades and blast it. At more or less the same time, tactical unit SA with Sophia at the front set on fire a building 200 meters away. On the crossbow bolts smashing the windows, handmade grenades are dangling.

Explosion after explosion.

People walking the street are looking around left and right. There are even some, that took out their cameras and are trying to record it. I threw out a handmade grenade through the open doors. Gunpowder has been reduced to half. My hair is swayed by the explosion.

In the meantime havoc prevails somewhere else. Behind a crash involving several cars took place. There is no big crash because of the speed limit.

“Shall we also crush at least one hideout?” – I said, staring at the tablet. Sophia moves slowly, but using weapon range she prepares to show us her skill in blowing up two places at the same time. Rough breathing, long ears. She closes one eye, prepares the crossbow and pulls the trigger.

I smiled.

“Damn straight, let’s do it.” – said Omar and ostentatiously stepped on the accelerator. He stormed into oncoming cars, driving in zig-zag, crushing several times and finally splattering products from the Korean food store and making the car crash into a Chinese restaurant. Before it Omar and I abandon the car.

This time explosion is big. Blue marks on the tablet indicating explosions are starting to grow rapidly. Roughly 24 places. Among it 9 warehouses. My orders are to destroy them completely. Those are illegal businesses, which the criminal syndicate didn’t insure. That’s why the destruction of warehouses is a greater damage for their actual finances than one can expect.

“And next strike the enemy tactical units to reduce their forces. All units, begin the assault!” – while I was giving that instructions, Omar entered the store and shot with a gun in the air.

Customers and store staff run away. Ones who haven't escaped are members of the organization. Omar fires six shots from the pistol, killing three. He raised the fallen table and put it before me. I brought the chairs and then we sat.

"You're alive, aren't you?" – sitting on the chair and looking at the tablet I said to a member of the organization, who seemed to have heavy injury from the first car storming.

"Don't worry. You won't die from that. Can you call your boss? Tell him that you're humbly hoping for negotiation. I'll wait 5 minutes. You value your life that much, right? If you don't do that here I want you to tell your boss that something terrible will happen to your homes, family and even family of the people you love."

Omar waved a broken glass and then pouring tea into it, said: "Impressive villain speech."

"It's okay. Communication with the children has been cut off. It's bad for children's education after all."

"Why don't we invite them to the negotiations? I've been always respecting your efforts to end battles and I want you to teach them that."

We passed the broken glass between us and drunk from it with Omar in turns. It seemed he said that seriously. As for me, well... I replied that I will think about it next time. I couldn't have lived if children would think that I'm a sly adult.

I look at the tablet. Gini's tactical unit SE is in contact with the enemy who left the store. Distance of the enemy, their numbers and armament is displaying before me by the illumination of children composing the unit. I give Gini a command to retreat. Gini unit split left and right and hide behind the building. They are under fire.

From another side, supplied with Mausers Ivan's unit began simultaneous fire, killing four enemies who came out before

the store. It can't be permitted for them to hide inside, so that's why they throw Molotov cocktails inside. In Okubo there is a lot of this sort of illegal businesses, also this restaurant, that's why it will be hard to rebuild. Well, that's not my problem. I also lost 7500000 yens, so we have a draw.

Police has began making chaos. It seems they want to make for the scene fast, but it's quite difficult because of the traffic accident.

Still, we have five minutes left – I thought. Considering the odds police will undoubtedly wait with the assault, so maybe we have even more time.

“Arata, something strange is going on there!” – Sophie says loudly. I looked at the data tablet, frowning. I want to say that I already grasped the situation, but well... there is a lot of times when it's better to be informed anyway. I also understand the emotions.

Illuminator of Sophie's unit captures the enemy image. I thought if that's the bad news Ms. Ito was talking about. I switch to the communication.

“Sophie, keep the distance without engaging.”

“But they are heading straight toward us.”

“I don't know much about the enemy, so I can't let you fight. I need more data.”

“Ummm... There are people with a metal rod. Two of them actually. They are piled with heavy defensive armament.”

“Tactical unit SD, Ivan try to snipe them.”

“Understood.”

I wait five seconds.

“No good. With Mausers it's completely impossible. We've just turned a corner, firing from machine guns.”

“Okay, thanks.”

For the time being I terminated the call.

“Omar, do you know what kind of defensive armament they might have?”

“Dunno. But if Mausers and Tokarevs don’t work that means a threat.”

“Well, it indeed is for our infantry.”

“They send a messenger for negotiations?”

“No, I think it must be their last hope.” – after saying that, I opened the transmission.

“Djibril.”

“Yes.”

“10 minutes left. Begin preparation for retreat. All units shall move one by one. Withdraw toward Higashi-Nakano.”

“What about you?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll come there shortly.”

I switch over the signal.

“Sophie. About those enemy exosuit thing...”

“It looks like external frame rather than a suit. It’s just there are metal joints on either sides and backs!”

“So it’s an exoskeleton. Well, it’s good that it’s not one like in anime! I don’t feel guilt then. So it seems like gun bullet doesn’t work.”

“Yeah.”

“What about crossbows and hand grenades?”

“I’ll try it at once. I have their backs, so I’m ready.”

“I’m counting on you.”

I hear the sound of an explosion nearby.

“Enemy has lost upper half of the body. Arrow has penetrated, so I’ll be probably able to bring the enemy down.”

“No, just quickly bring down the other one. After you do it, I want you to withdraw. Ivan, Gini. You caused great damage to enemy tactical unit. It’s okay now. All unit, commence retreat.”

Increased weight of infantry’s heavy defense equipment causes, that finally the increased weight exceeds capabilities of this infantry. Because of this there are robot cars like donkeys, but there was a military organization, which attempted a different method. I think it was in China.

Anyway. I beat the enemy before I knew his name.

Beside the tour bus a few men walk with unhappy expressions, after which they enter the restaurant.

“Good evening. We’ve came here for negotiations.” – I said with a smile on my face.

One of the men guffaws. It was one of the anglers, the elder one.

“Didn’t you say you don’t want to meet with us again. You liar.”

“You’re smart, so I’m sure you knew from my words that it was the operation.”

Elder man doesn’t stop laughing. He laughs to tears.

“I see, so that’s how it was?”

“You are standing around talking. Won’t you have a sit?”

“Yeah. Kajita you sit too.”

The elder man looked for a fallen chair and sat down.

“No, Kajita. Take him to the hospital.”

Skinhead man called Kajita glanced at me and the elder man

with the eyes of hatred or a madman and then walked away, taking the injured person.

I looked at the elder man.

“Are you from the criminal organization? Or from the religious group?”

“The latter one. Boss of the former one doesn’t have the guts. He is probably shaking in bed right now. Oh, this person is Mr. Yang. Deputy boss.”

The person called Yang sit in the chair, scowling at me. He has a slender face and wears an elegant suit.

“Such anarchy makes any business impossible in this neighborhood.”

“I haven’t planned that at first.” – I said, smiling.

“They are real warmongers and don’t think about scramble for territory.” – the elder man assured. The person called Yang looked at me like I were a foreign substance. Criminals, warmongers and religious terrorist? Worst negotiations ever. – I thought, smiling bitterly. Well, however they see me, I don’t feel anything.

“Excuse me.”

“What are you aiming for?” – said Mr. Yang.

“Tomorrow I’m going to leave the country and I wanted to ensure safety.” – I said honestly.

“You fight for ensuring safety? Warmongers are mad. There is no comparison with religion.”

The elder man laughs loudly.

“Are you stupid or what?” – said Mr. Yang, looking at me and the elder man. When it comes to common sense he seemed the most normal.

I shrug my shoulders.

“Even if you say that. Hadn’t I attacked, you would strike in revenge, right? That’s why I took precautions!”

“Indeed, excellent precautions. There are great damages to put it mildly. But our followers are unhurt. Warmonger, didn’t your actions born a cause and effect, called desire for revenge?”

I nodded.

“Yes, but well... even if it will be the chain of revenge, it won’t make money for our criminals, right? Isn’t a job for religious organizations to forgive?”

“What are you?” – said Mr. Yang, scowling at me.

“I didn’t have hard feelings from the start. It’s work after all. I only attacked, because the request of the government. Even if they hate me and are troubled by that. That’s what I only wanted to tell you.”

Imitating Ms. Ito I blend a lie into the truth. Mr. Yang face has become dark red in anger.

“Why they are using one’s like you, not the police?”

“I just made a reason for the police to intervene! And now they are in this town. I recommend to run away, leave country and hide your assets before it’s too late.”

“The reason for the police to intervene, huh? How many people you have killed to reach that, you son of a bitch?”

“Everyone would be dissatisfied if even more would be killed, no? I also don’t like that.” – I said calmly.

“I would be happy if you let us peacefully go.”

“Can’t promise that.” – said Mr. Yang.

“That’s unfortunate. Well then...”

I stood up from chair.

“Wait.” – I was called to stop.

“I promise.” – Mr. Yang said a different thing than few seconds ago and he was shaking. It seemed that he didn’t know it was the negotiations. Only by strict violence I’ll hear it. It was a proper military thing to do, making use of military strength as one of the diplomatic methods. Simple way to make the other side talk by using violence. It seemed Mr. Yang couldn’t accept the breakdown in negotiation and our continuous attacks. Well, with such damages another organization will come to steal their territory, and since I’m proclaiming from the beginning that I won’t be taking part in this, from their point of view continuous fights with us will double their enemies.

Even shoulders of Mr. Yang are shaking. But I ignored it. It must be unbearable for a criminal to receive sympathy from his assailant.

“Yes. I think it’s better to be assured. What about you?”

I looked at the elder man. He was laughing.

“Our people are still unhurt. Well, it’s not unreasonable, although I think it would go quiet well for us if we had a fight with you.” – said the elder man, laughing. I wondered if he was willing to die. I don’t want to associate with such people, but when I see his face I have a different feeling.

“Yes, I think that too. That’s why I came to negotiate.”

The elder man smiled gently. I’ve been smiling too.

“That’s an awkward negotiation.”

“It’s not my specialty.”

“By the way, is it profitable to be a warmonger?”

“Not really. Once per two there is no payment.”

“So why are you doing this?”

“I don’t have other talents. Besides I’m not into crime. If it comes to the money aspect I think it would be more profitable to work with a criminal organization.”

The elder man crossed his arms and nodded.

“Does such person as me can do it too?”

“I think you can. If someone like me does. But tactics which premise harm are not liked.”

The elder man obediently nodded.

“I have something to ask you. Can we go together, when you will be leaving country?”

“I think you can. How many people?”

“Well, at most half of us. That makes four. Rest will probably stay.” – said the elder man. I agreed.

Well, now with the revenge on guru and getting tired of Japan, which placated him, perhaps leaving Japan is a way to live. Considering all of that I nodded.

“I see. Japan is a good place, isn’t it? Can we conclude the negotiations by a condition that four or five people will leave the country?”

The elder man nodded. I also agreed. The negotiations have been concluded. The war has ended.

“Okay. I’ll do my best.”

I was going to shake hands with him, but in the end I didn’t do it. That’s a sloppy ending, but I was grateful that I’ll be able to safely leave.

Epilogue

Return abroad

Narita Airport

Narita Airport is more shabby than Haneda, considering it's supposed to be the front door of Japan.

In the end I wasn't able to show them Haneda Airport – I thought.

After I joined the children at Higashi-Nakano, I called Ms. Ito to talk about the disposal of weapons and arranging us a transport, then I head toward the airport.

The news helicopters were incessantly flying all over in the vicinity of Okubo and Shinjuku to examine the situation. It was quite a noisy morning.

“That was a nice stay.” – said Omar meekly and patted my back.

“Sarcasm?”

“No, tempura for instance, it was delicious.”

“I'm glad. I was able to meet with Arata after all.”

Carefully putting on a white hat, Sophie smiled at me. Saying nothing, I turned behind.

I look at the exhausted children. Some look sleepy as they're rubbing their eyes.

“Forgive me the rush.” – when I said that, the children smiled for some reason. It was a warm smile.

“But we've won.” – said Gini like it was important. Lot of kids were also agreeing. Being grateful for their kindness I was

looking for Ms. Ito, who was supposed to have tickets for the flight.

“Who are you looking for?” – the refined woman said walking and stopped. I was surprised.

“Oh, um... You have my plane tickets.”

“Right, here.”

The refined woman took out the tickets from the bag and handed them over to me.

“Departure is in one hour.”

“Thank you very much.”

I nodded. I wanted to say goodbye to Ms. Ito, but I don't know what to say to her anyway so I thought it's good as it is. Refined woman gives me a piercing look.

“Still, you've really done it.”

“I am sorry. I wanted to ensure my own safety.” – I said honestly. Refined woman is looking at me.

“I wonder if it's really only for safety. Didn't your sense of justice and patriotism want to crush the criminal organization and religious group for making such disturbance at Shinjuku Central Park?”

“Wouldn't it just spread the disturbance instead?”

“Yes. That's right. This is why controlling the enemy, not destroying, is important.”

“Control them cleverly. So that things like this don't happen. Put them to sleep so that citizens can live in peace. When they wake up it won't be good.”

“Well, we will use the disturbance you made as best as we can. We'll spread the rumor, that the government carried out a special plan. If criminals will become cautious to not destroy

themselves if they go too far, this country also might become slightly better.”

“I wish that will happen.”

Old woman smiled bitterly in a manner, which didn't fit her age. She gave me a package.

“What is it?”

“With such commotion I wondered if I should give it or not, but it's a reward for removing two hindrances to this country. Or maybe a prepayment for the contract, which we didn't pay before.”

I glimpsed at the package. It was cash. I have to scatter it and carry somewhere else later. It wasn't 7500000, but there could be around 3000000.

Merely such shootout and 3000000 yens. I suppressed my feelings of gaining good profit and decided to walk toward the departure gate.

“Thank you very much and goodbye, Ms. Ito.” – I said, walking out. Ms. Ito disguised as an old woman smiled and saw us off. I was curious how old she really is, but it was also better to keep it a mystery.

“Yo, warmonger.”

Group of several skinheads appeared like they were waiting for me to move out. At the front stood the older angler.

“Kajita haven't come?”

“He said that he likes this country.” – despite so many bitter experiences, the older man said it gently.

“I see. Can I ask your name?”

“Shuwa.”

“Mr. Shuwa, is it? I think that overseas aren't bad too.”

“Right, but still there are just kids on your side.”

“Since you’re adults, I won’t look after you.”

“Only four or five aren’t so bad, right?” – Mr. Shuwa said, walking. An unthinkable conversation, taking into account that until yesterday we were killing each other. It was totally not worth dying. – I thought. Death would be just a waste. One who survived, drives away thoughts about victims to live.

“We have low salary.”

That was the last words before leaving Japan.

In the plane

Before I knew it, Djibril was sitting next to me in the plane. Again I’m going far from Japan territory, but I was more concerned about Djibril’s expression. She kept looking to the side.

“Your neck will be hurting.”

“I’m fine.”

“Shall I change you with Ivan or...?”

Djibril turned toward me. She loosens the headgear a bit and glares at me.

“My bad.” – I said. Djibril looked down.

“It’s my bad. Please, get mad at me.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong. It’s okay, don’t worry.”

“We’ve dragged a bad djinn.”

You mean Sophie? – I thought. I smile bitterly.

“But it’s a harsh judgment. She helped us actually. I rated her too low. She’s more useful than me.”

Djibril raised her head and looked at me. For some reason she

looked like she was about to cry.

“I hated that you treated that person specially. I hate her. So... scold me.”

Instead of scolding I pat her on the head.

“It’s okay, that’s a trivial thing.” – I said. I didn’t say that if it was possible I didn’t want to make her fight, because I thought it would lead to an argument.

End of Volume 2

Afterword

It's been a while. Forgive me for keeping you waiting. It's Shibamura. I'm delivering you "Marginal Operation 02".

First release was in February, and now we have September, so I kept you waiting for around seven months. I'm sorry for that.

While fans and salesmen were asking me when it will be published, I was working at completely different things: two novels ("Cubism Love" and "Gun Blood Days"), three games (social game "Gun blood days", board game "Yuke!Nobunaga Kashindan", tankobon for TRPG "A no Mahoujin"), three mangas (two volumes of "Cubism Love", two volumes of "Rakusen" and September publication – three volumes of "Gunparade March: Another Princess").

Putting aside excuses, I was making arrangements with edition, while looking at reader responses, but I haven't imagined that majority of voices will be asking for a fast sequel.

Next time I'll publish the continuation fast, so I kindly beg for your forgiveness .

This time, the actual work took me twenty days. I was strictly keeping myself to write six thousand characters a day. I was doing it with a pomera DM100. It was very enjoyable to work with this machine, so I thought that I'll write with this next time too. There's probably nothing better than this, except a fountain pen (it can also depend on PC and whether it has Ichitaro).

This time the story advanced more than in the previous volume, rising a bit of tension for the protagonist as well. His character also is getting a little better.

Comparing to dryness of the first volume on desert, this time

Japan as a stage brings a little wet feeling. Maybe next time it will be more damp.

I'll tell you that I planned that Arata is getting arrested in the opening scene, but putting aside his feelings, please be advised that it probably won't go well if the story would end with deportation of children.

Another time, there is a mention of Aral Sea, but in a present day Aral Sea is a dead sea, so there's no fishery there. That is why children didn't so often eat seafood.

By the way, about Ms. Ito and family. I have a model for that. This time on that occasion I received a guidance from several people, who were informants. Thank you very much. Forgive me for selfishly making an agent a woman. I wanted a black haired beauty.

Last but not least. I plan to publish "Marginal Operation 03" on February 2013. I hope that next time I'll meet you together with Arata who fights a powerful enemy. Looking forward to it.

August 2012, Yuri Shibamura

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